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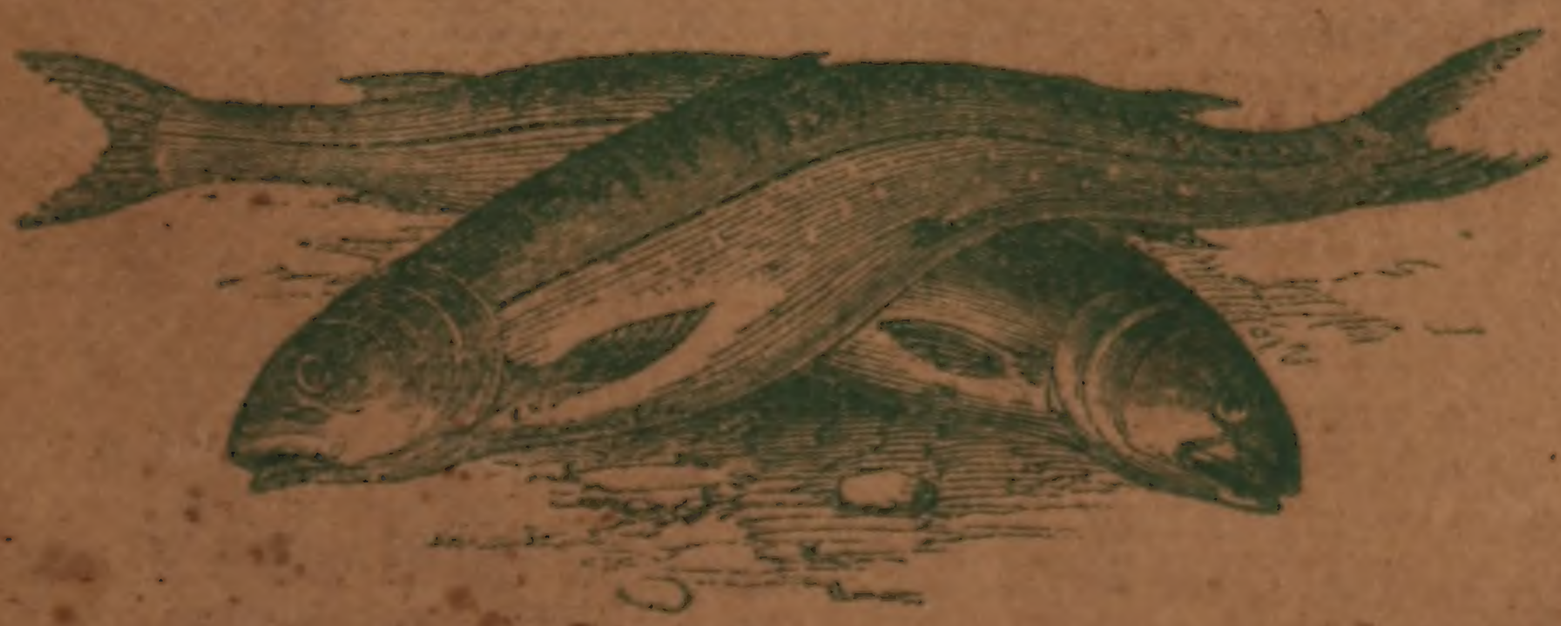
LETTERS

FROM THE

HIGHLANDS,

OR

Two Months among the Salmon and the Deer.



BY

JAMES CONWAY.

LONDON:

EDWARD LUMLEY, 514, NEW OXFORD STREET.

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AT

LUMLEY'S, 514, NEW OXFORD STREET.

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THROUGH THE SUPPORT OF

MR. AARON PATTEN



TAKING UP THE LINE

LETTERS

FROM THE

HIGHLANDS,

OR

Two Months among the Salmon and the Deer.



BY

JAMES CONWAY.

LONDON:

EDWARD LUMLEY, 514, NEW OXFORD STREET.

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PREFACE.

Our bonnie isle—at least considerably more than the southern half of it—is now so crossed and recrossed by the many intersecting lines of "rail" which have of late sprung into being, and which are still multiplying, that the map of England in "Bradshaw" is beginning to bear a strong resemblance to the web which we might imagine constructed by some eccentric old spider, who, defying all the rules of geometry, sacrifices symmetry to utility, content if only his meshes are strong enough to secure for him occasionally a goodly blue-bottle. Along these lines, which form, as it were, the veins and arteries of the country, the glowing blood of England courses and recourses vigorously, in constantly renewed pulsations, between her heart of hearts, the Metropolis, and her distant extremities. Thus it comes to pass that many, taking advantage of the comparative proximity into which even the Highlands of Scotland are now brought, and yielding to that roaming propensity, so characteristic of the Englishman, leave behind them for awhile the ledger or the loom, and seek relief from the sedentary occupations of a town life, in the bracing climate and invigorating recreations to be found in the "land of the mountain and the flood." It is for such as these the following pages are chiefly intended. The author, himself a mere tyro in the branches of sport therein treated of, would give to *brother-*

beginners some idea of the enjoyment which is attainable by all who may be possessed of ordinary activity and perseverance. With this object in view, he has endeavoured to give a faithful narrative of his own experiences; and while, for the advantage and warning of the novice, he has not left unrecorded his own errors, he would humbly deprecate severe criticism at the hands of the more experienced veteran.

The following pages have been compiled from letters and notes written among the scenes which they attempt to portray. It should however be here stated, that the present connected series of letters was not in contemplation at the time when the first was written. But after six had appeared in the columns of that excellent publication 'The Field' newspaper, and more were still in hand, it was thought advisable to publish them all together in a small volume. Thus it is the Author has been led on to present them to the Public, in the hope that they might be found in some degree interesting to all lovers of the Rod or the Rifle.

Brighton

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Letters from the Highlands.

LETTER I.



MY DEAR FRIEND,

True to my promise—that I would do my best to enliven the dreary hours you obstinately spend in the city, when, instead of wreathing your legs fantastically round the long lanky supporters of your stool, you ought to have been along with me stretching them across the moors, or straining your eyes in search of antlers rising indistinctly above the heather in the dim distance, instead of running them anxiously up the columns of £ *s. d.*,—true, I say, to my promise, made when last we enjoyed a weed together, and shook hands through the carriage-window at Euston Square, I proceed to give you such an account as can be accomplished by my feeble pen. Feeble, did I say? 'T is a quill, plucked by my friend Donald from the kingly pinion of the eagle, worthy indeed of a chieftain's bonnet, and has soared full oft, I ween, beyond the ken of man—higher far, I fear, than any flight it is destined again to take, at least in my fingers.

But though I may not aspire or hope to dispel the "heavy wet," communicated to your mind by the grey canopy of mist and smoke combined which hangs above you, while I picture, vividly as I can, the marvellous clearness and bracing effects of the atmosphere it has been my fortune to breathe in these regions, as yet untainted by the smoke of city; nor yet to make that heart of thine beat even

one small stroke faster by the recital of my humble experiences; yet will I do my best to give you an account which shall be at the least faithful; and as to the rest, you must e'en—as you know, Jack, full oft we have had to do, when Betsy, good girl, in her anxiety to give us an extra treat, only succeeded in spoiling the supper—you must, I say, e'en take the will for the deed.

To begin, then. Without stopping to dwell upon the journey hither, the scenery through which we passed, or the petty hindrances and annoyances we experienced—such as the loss of Walter's "wide-awake," which, apparently preferring a lively flight through the pure air of heaven to the drowsy atmosphere of the railway-carriage, suddenly took its departure through the window; or, again, my anxiety about a certain box, containing all my fishing-tackle, which *would* most provokingly stay behind, and for which we had eventually to interrupt our journey by a delay of two days in "auld Reekie," the box having booked itself to some place nobody knew where,—I must beg you to transport yourself at once, in imagination at least, though, alas! not *in propriâ personâ*, to one of the wildest "straths" in the Highlands, while I "take a header" *in medias res.*

On the first morning after our arrival at the hospitable abode of our friends we sallied forth, fishing-rod in hand, Donald Mackay and the landing-net in attendance, intent on attacking the salmon as a beginning.

But, before proceeding further, I must give you a description of the said Donald, for whom I have conceived a great admiration; and would that I could do him justice! Picture to yourself, then, a lad who has seen but sixteen summers, yet not a hair's breadth short of six foot, and broad and well-built withal. He wore a short jacket of black and white check, which showed off his proportions to advantage, his "trewes" and plaid being of the same material, made from the wool of the sheep that roam on his native hills, and wrought in his own Highland home. From beneath a small bonnet his long flaxen hair streamed down in thick clusters; his manly countenance was ruddy with the fresh bloom of health, which in Scotland imparts a peculiar richness to the complexion; while his eye beamed with intelligence, and his whole frame displayed a union of strength and agility rarely to be found. A glance

told that he was capable of, and accustomed to, great bodily exertion; and, indeed, though his years are yet so few, many is the adventure in which Donald has taken his share. In climbing his dangerous way to the eagle's eyrie, ever perched on some almost if not completely inaccessible crag, and often some hundreds of feet above any safe footing,—in saving the life of the sheep, which, tempted by the sweetness of the grass in such localities, often tread their way along the narrow ledges of the rocks, until at length they find themselves unable to turn round, and, having no idea of retrograde motion, become terrified, and either throw themselves headlong down the face of the cliff or quietly await a death of starvation, unless rescued by a cool intrepidity worthy of the greatest hero,—or again in following up a wounded stag, with such skill and perseverance, that it is said he would in time overtake one, even though only wounded in a foot,—and indeed in all trials of strength, patience, and nerve, he is without a rival. Add to this a considerable supply of natural shrewdness, together with an education far above the average, at least among our English peasantry (for he can read his newspaper with a relish, and discuss many general topics of conversation, besides a smattering of Latin, which he acquired as a foster child at the laird's house), and you have, as near as I can give it, a description of my juvenile *fidus Achates*.

But to return. Donald led the way; and we found it no easy task to keep pace with him, as he strode along, or rather sprang, from one "moss-hagg" to another,—by which name you must understand the tufted lumps of dry earth which rise from the bogs, and, like so many islets, or, as we call them here, "inches," in a sea of peat, often afford the only safe footing to be had in such localities; the spaces between being a black deposit, frequently of so great a depth and so soft and moist, that one false step may involve an immersion to the neck. After some four miles of such travelling, we were not sorry, as you may suppose, to arrive at our destination for the day, the river Redburn. In consequence of recent rain in the hill whence the river takes its rise, we found a tolerable body of water, and so far matters were in our favour; but the Redburn is a sluggish stream, and requires a brisk wind to produce a ripple on its surface, or the fish will look with indifference on the most brilliant fly the angler can produce; and today the river would,

most provokingly, continue calm and smooth as a polished mirror, the only breeze being athwart the river, which it was prevented from ruffling by the height of the banks. Our only chance, therefore, was to follow the course of the stream, in the hopes that among its various windings some corner might be found where there was the much wished-for ripple. Accordingly, displaying our fly-books to the experienced eye of Donald, we each put our rods together, took the fly his judgment selected, and began our attempts on the finny tenants of the water.

"Long did we strive the obdurate foe to gain;"

But long, long also we "strove in vain." At length, however, our patience was rewarded; the wind chopped round, so as blow directly up the stream, and cheered our flagging spirits with a most enchanting little ripple.

The part of the river which we were to fish consisted of a succession of deep dark pools, worn into the peat soil; and Donald assured us that after very heavy rains there was a "graund" current, and that, consequently, at such times there "wasna bonnier feshing in a' Scautland;" but the late rains had not been heavy enough to produce that much-desired state, and the nearest approach to the appearance of a current was a slight runnel at the head of each pool. Walter took the lowest pool, while I was to proceed upwards, promising to keep within a short distance, that Donald might be available to assist either of us.

Scarcely had we separated, when Walter rose a fine "fesh." Donald and I were too late to see anything but the curl on the water, caused by his unsuccessful lunge after the fly. The "fesh," however, was not pricked, and we left Walter in a state of nervous hope that he would return to the charge.

Now, possibly, Jack, you may be disposed to smile at the bare idea of the nerves being affected by such a trifling cause as the rise of a fish; but you have not tried it, or you would not be guilty of such an egregious error. Your only acquaintance, as yet, with the "genus Salmo" has been as he lay on the marble slab at your fishmonger's, or transformed as he lay on the table; and, therefore, I can excuse your misconception. But, my dear fellow, suppose yourself (if you can) for the moment (I know it will require a great exercise of your imagination, but I ask it only for the moment),

suppose yourself a sportsman, or rather—which was Walter's case—a Londoner beginning his first season in the Highlands. You have journeyed many miles to catch your first salmon, never having as yet caught anything beyond a trout of a pound's weight, or a jack of five or six; you reach the bank of your river; you throw the fly, selected with so much care, at first timidly and anxiously, but gradually with more and more confidence, and eventually even carelessly; at length you reach the extreme pitch of negligence; your eyes dilate as you yield to reverie; your thoughts become scattered, as you whip the waters mechanically; when suddenly a slight curl appears on the surface, a sob-like sound for a moment reaches your ear, as though some troubled water-sprite had just sunk beneath the wave, and instantly an electric shock passes swiftly up your line and down your rod, which at once dispels all your "castles in the air," and awakens you to the reality that *you* have just lost your first salmon.

Leaving Walter to try for better luck, we again started to proceed up the stream, passing two or three likely pools, whose merits however I did not test,—Donald's advice being that I should at once direct my steps to the best spot in the river, which was some little distance further up. After sundry frantic leaps over tributary burns, whose black peaty bottoms—suggestive of the idea of a "sinking *fund*," in addition to Donald's testimony to their *swallowing capacities*, founded, as he said, on the experience of various involuntary immersions—deterred us from attempting to wade them, we reached the wished-for spot. And a likely spot it was; a large oval-shaped pool, evidently of great depth, and capable of harbouring any amount of fish; and, as the breeze shifted about, leaving calm patches on its surface, we could distinctly perceive, far down in its dark but transparent waters, huge masses of peat-soil, which the floods of winter had torn from the banks, and affording splendid retreats for shy fish. Above, the channel grew narrower, and the current, in consequence, more lively; the tangled arms of a huge root, the sole survivor of some giant of those primeval forests which once covered these now treeless regions, stood boldly out in the middle of this narrowed channel, and, strengthened by a mass of *débris* borne down from the moors above, checked the stream in its course, and produced two pretty runnels at the head

of the pool, which, uniting a few yards below, became gradually lost in the stiller depths and wider expanse of the pool itself. "Noo, sir," said Donald, "noo, sir, a'm thenking, if there be a saulmon in a' the river, 't will just be here;" and I quite agreed with him. "Cast below the auld root, and let her float doon, 't is a bonny current noo." I did so; but the cast proved a blank. However, *patientia est virtus* said a voice from "auld lang syne," when as a schoolboy I first began my accidence; and so I repeated the dose, and once more my fly reached the tail of the runnel unassailed: but, just as I began to raise my rod for another cast, the water curled round it; I heard a sullen, lunging kind of noise; and, whr-r-r-r-r,—I had hooked my salmon. "Ay, but 'twill be a braw fesh thaat, sir!" ejaculated Donald, and so it was; but, unfortunately, it was not yet landed, nor did it seem at all disposed to be tractable. At first he rushed madly down the middle of the pool, ploughing a deep furrow as he went, and then sprang wildly into the air, trying the strength and elasticity of my tackle to the utmost. This, however, was scarcely the most critical part of the struggle; for sullenly retiring under the base of one of the above-mentioned masses of peat,—bent apparently on wearing out my patience,—he remained immovable, in spite of all my efforts to dislodge him. My tackle was not strong enough to drag him out by main force; and, though it was scarcely probable that he would be able to rid himself of my double hook, yet there was a great danger of his fretting my line against some stone or root, until it should give way. Donald seemed to think that my only chance was to get him out of his retreat as quickly as possible, and accordingly began to throw stones at him.

At this moment our attention was attracted by a shout from Walter; and, on looking towards him, we saw at once that he also was in deadly struggle with some unseen antagonist; and, judging by the hyperbolic shape and the peculiar quivering motion of his rod, it was no contemptible contest in which he was engaged. I could not however, at present at least, dispense with Donald, and so, very selfishly, left Walter to shift for himself. My fish now was once more induced to leave his retreat and resume the contest, which every moment threatened the rupture of my tackle. His varied evolutions, dives, and flights through the air, as they tho-

roughly baffled my skill in dealing with them at the time, so they now completely beggar description. Gradually, however, he began to put out signals of distress; his evolutions became more confined, his struggles less severe; and at length, to my inexpressible delight, he suffered himself to be drawn slowly alongside, and Donald, cautiously getting the landing-net beneath him, lifted him ashore and laid him at my feet, declaring that he did not weigh an ounce under "sexteen punds."

My fish at length secure, I found how very precarious had been my hold upon him. One of the hooks of my fly had broken out of his flesh, and the other was retained by a mere thread, so very slender that it seemed a perfect marvel that some of his last short but desperate struggles had not released him. Had his strength held out but a little longer, he must have escaped. However, all chance for him was now gone; there he lay conquered and gasping; and Donald, taking up a stone, by one knock on the forehead for ever terminated his existence.

Thus, Jack, was my patience rewarded, and my first salmon killed. I was now an initiated brother of the gentle craft; and, though you may not be able to enter into the feelings of that moment, I can assure you the sense of exultation was very great. A salmon, in his own element, is indeed no despicable antagonist; for, from his activity, he may baffle the skill of the most expert, while his strength is sufficient to weary the stoutest arm; and it is only by patience and care that victory can be won.

But I must not suffer myself to dwell too long upon my own emotions, while Walter is still struggling with his fish. Now that there could be no longer any doubt that my own fish was *hors de combat*, we set off at once to his assistance, and found him also "wi' a graund fesh," as Donald said, at the end of his line, still resisting bravely, and, judging from appearances, intending to resist for some time to come. My own fight had lasted twenty minutes; but this promised apparently to be much longer. Immediately after our arrival the fish retreated under the opposite bank, and I began to expect a repetition of the tactics I had myself so recently dealt with. For some minutes we endeavoured to dislodge him by throwing stones, while Walter tried to irritate him by constantly jerking the line; but all proved unavailing. At length, however

as a last resource, we sent Donald to ford some shallow part of the river, and get round to the opposite side of the pool, that he might drive out the fish if possible. On reaching the spot, and looking down from the top of the bank, Donald reported some huge roots visible below him, into which the fish must have retreated. He then made several attempts to dislodge the enemy, by thrusting down the shaft of the landing-net; but it seemed as though nothing could move him. At length, however, by dint of stirring and poking, the opposition sensibly lessened, and by degrees the line came away, with a heavy weight attached to it, which proved to be a dead root, to which the salmon had succeeded in transferring the hook from his own jaws, and consequently had effected his escape.

Such was the mortifying termination of our worthy friend's first essay. There remained, however, nothing for it but to hope for better success with the next. We had, while standing here, observed more than one good rise at the head of the pool; and Walter proceeded to try his luck again, while I returned once more to my upper pool,—Donald remaining to assist with the head as well as the arm, should circumstances require it.

But *quid multa?* Not to make my letter tedious, I will content myself with these two specimens of our sport, and give you the result at the close of this our first day as briefly as possible. Suffice it then to say, that between us we succeeded in producing, in the graphic words of Donald, "no' a bad kettle o' fesh." My share of the plunder was four salmon, and cleaner fish I should never wish to see; their weights respectively 7lb., 9lb., 11lb., and 15lb. Walter surpassed me in numbers, though not in weight, killing three salmon weighing between 8lb. and 10lb. each, and three sea trout, their weights 3lb., 3½lb., and 4½lb., making about 38lb. to my 42lb.

On reaching the ford where the road (such as it is) crosses the river, we were agreeably surprised to find a carriage waiting at the shepherd's shieling close by to convey us home, where we arrived in high good-humour with ourselves, our first day's sport, and the kind attention of our hospitable friends.

Our plan of future proceedings is not yet laid out, nor have we quite decided what we shall do next. As a general rule, Walter is

to shoot the moors for grouse, etc., while I take to the hills for deer, each following the bent of his own inclination.

You will probably, therefore, in a few days receive (what I hope will prove) a stirring account of my exploits in the forest, which, by-the-by, is a forest only in name; for I am told that it cannot boast of a single tree,—there being, at the best, only a few low stunted bushes, and these very few and far between, and only in the most sheltered glens.

And now, dear Jack, I must wish you good night. The fumes of fine old toddy, dark as sherry, from being *cado servata per annos*, are stealing dreamily over my senses. May you sleep as soundly as I shall!



LETTER II.



HOPE my last reached you in safety; the use of which most trite of all expressions I am sure you would pardon, were you but aware of the precarious state of the postal communications in these latitudes. That important Government official, the postman, only "puts in an appearance" twice a week, even in the most favourable weather; in the winter but once a week, or indeed just as he can make his way through the snow. The loss, therefore, of his horse's shoe, the breaking of a strap, or many another such trifling accident, may cause a delay of three days, —to say nothing of the greater chance, in the confusion and misapprehension produced between the Gael who "has no English," and the English who "has no Gaelic," of a letter being mis-sent altogether.

Well, Jack, at last I have been among the deer. You know how much I have looked forward to this as the acme of British sport. At length, then, my dreams have been realized; and though I have not, for this once, met with as much success as I had hoped, yet I have gained an insight which nothing but experience can give, and have enjoyed myself immensely; so much so, that I think nothing could have heightened the pleasure, unless it were to have had you

along with me. To stand on some hill's barren brow, with nothing of human cultivation visible,—nothing but the boundless heavens above, mountain looming beyond mountain in one direction, and the broad expanse of the Atlantic sleeping far beneath in the other, with no vegetation but the heather, the bilberry, and the juniper straggling up the mountain-sides, until all becomes bare rock, blasted and shattered by the storms of ages,—what more calculated to impress one with one's own littleness and the majesty and grandeur of that Being who was the Maker of the everlasting hills, and stilleth the raging of the seas?

On Monday we set off (Walter and I), attended by two gillies (Sandy and Donald), driving, as far as the road lay in our direction, in a dog-cart, which gave us a lift of some five miles. A short pull up a steep "brae" brought us to the cottage of a dignitary yclept "the fox-hunter"—a most useful though nondescript character on a Highland farm—whose occupation of keeping down the number of vermin (such as martins, foxes, otters, eagles, *et id genus omne*) is agreeably varied, when occasion requires an extra hand, by the duties of either keeper or shepherd. We had no sooner reached his door, than we were assailed and completely hemmed in by a large and most unpleasantly clamorous pack of the so-called fox-hounds, composed of smooth terriers, Skyes, and English hounds, with crosses and mongrels *ad infinitum*. The clamour of the hounds and our own consequent alarm somewhat abated, we learnt that though Gillespie himself (the fox-hunter) was away on a distant part of the farm, he had left instructions for us with his wife; and she accordingly entered into a long colloquy with Donald, not one word of which could Walter or I comprehend, being entirely Gaelic; but the substance of it, as he afterwards informed us, was to the effect that a fine stag had been seen lately, more than once, in a hollow in Ben Fuoghlin, not more than three miles distant from the cottage, and that there were several roe-deer in some birch woods in Strathmohr, about five miles off, and nearly in the same direction; so that the two places might be visited in the same day, before fairly entering the distant and more unfrequented parts of the forest.

Accordingly, sending Sandy forward with a large bag of provisions which we had brought with us, composed of barley ban-

nocks, mutton ham, and usquebaugh, to the hut where we purposed passing the night, and possibly, if sport should prove good, two or three nights, we retained Donald to carry our arms, consisting of my rifle and gun and Walter's "dooble-barrel," which carried ball very well, and set our faces to mount Ben Fuoghlin. An hour's good climbing brought us in sight of the hollow frequented by the stag. We had before made several pauses to reconnoitre with our glasses, as we mounted from one steppe to another, during one of which Walter brought down a very fine hawk, which Donald pronounced to be a young gled, its wings measuring at least five feet from tip to tip. Now, however, we made a more lengthened pause, and scanned every foot of ground before us, but all to no purpose. "'Twill no be here the day," was Donald's remark as he stowed his glass away, and strode silently off; and we entered the hollow. Nothing occurred to stop us; so, moistening our lips at a most delicious little fount, which bubbled up in the centre of the dell and then stole quietly away among moss and juniper, we once more faced the brae, Donald informing us that, after a little climbing, we should have a kind of plateau to traverse rather more than a mile in length, and could then descend direct into the woods where the roe were to be found.

Just as we reached the brow of this hill, and were rather distressed for want of that all-requisite article, breath, our attention was suddenly attracted by Donald, who muttered something between his teeth which sounded very much like a Gaelic imprecation, and then dropped on his knees. The cause of this sudden movement was immediately visible to us, for over Donald's shoulder we descried a fine stag trotting away from us at a brisk pace, and distant about a quarter of a mile. We watched the noble animal receding, in the hope that it might take to some secluded spot near at hand, where we might yet have a shot; but no such good fortune. "'Twill just be ganging straight for the forest," said Donald, with a look of disgust, as the stag disappeared from our sight. We were quite puzzled as to how the deer could have been disturbed, for the wind was fair for us, and he could not possibly have seen us. But while we were standing in doubt, the question was solved by the appearance of a shepherd with his colley, who told us that he had started the stag from a burn on the other side of the hill.

This was very provoking; but as it had been through no fault of ours, we were the less annoyed. Walter and I were for following up the game; but we yielded to the better judgment of Donald, who assured us that we should see no more of it today. Our only chance, therefore, was among the roe.

Having now, however, but one gilly with us, and two at least being necessary to beat the woods, we easily induced the shepherd to accompany us, and set off at once in quest of fresh game. Our path lay for some distance along the plateau which I mentioned before, the Gaelic name of which (though I forget it at this moment) means the hog's back. We were now on elevated ground—about 2500 feet above the sea—and the view was fine in the extreme, the air being wonderfully clear, so that we could see to a great distance in every direction. Before us were hills rising above hills, in every variety of contour, from the barrow-shaped, well-rounded summits of the "old red sandstone" to the precipitous peaks and rugged outlines of the more primitive formations,—here and there some grand patriarch rearing his bald forehead above the lesser groups around him, while numerous mountain lochs were scattered about the hollows, some glittering in the sunshine, and others almost lost in shade beneath the overhanging crags. On either side ran two parallel "straths" or vales, named respectively "Strath Mohr" and "Strathsbeallog" (the "great vale" and the vale of the hunter"), down the centres of which ran two slightly winding rivers, presenting an appearance somewhat like one of those huge skeletons which a geologist loves to contemplate as he finds its outline in the alluvial soil,—the central river representing the backbone, slightly displaced, and the numerous tributary burns its several ribs. Behind us lay the broad bosom of the ocean, calm and smooth, interlapping with the land in many a bay and estuary, and dotted with the red sails of the herring-boats, which formed a bead-like chain, running in festoons along the line of coast.

With such a panorama laid out before us, we had reached, before we were aware of it, the point at which we were to descend at once into the birch woods. Here we paused, that Donald might explain to us the tactics we should adopt. There were two woods, separated by a glade about fifty yards in breadth, down which leapt a mountain torrent, its banks too precipitous and wide apart for even

a deer to leap, save at one spot, marked by a huge boulder-stone. Here, therefore, the deer would be sure to cross, if driven out in that direction; there was also a pass at the other end of the wood, by which they were in the habit of taking their departure if forced that way, though they naturally avoided the open, and took to the second wood, if possible. The plan therefore was, that while the two gillies were beating the cover, we should occupy these two spots with our guns. Withdrawing our balls, we loaded with buckshot, as more suited to the game; and, as Walter did not purpose joining me in this particular branch of sport after the present occasion, I gave him the choice of stations; and he accordingly took his stand at the boulder-stone, while I took the pass at the further end.

At the time agreed upon, when we were all supposed to have had sufficient time to reach our several positions, the beating commenced. For some time nothing was heard; and then a loud shout proclaimed the game afoot. My heart now began to beat audibly; for, of course, I did not know which way the game might be making, and in a moment it might shoot past and escape, if I were not vigilant. My ears, therefore, were strained to the utmost to catch any sounds of approach; but in vain. Just, however, as I quite accidentally cast a look upwards, I caught sight of a roebuck standing on a crag some eighty yards distant, and looking down in an attitude of the most profound attention upon me; his head slightly on one side, his neck stretched forward, and one fore-foot a little raised, ready to give one stamp of warning, and then bound away. In an instant my gun was to my shoulder, and I fired; but the buck had sprung from the spot almost before I touched the trigger, and I heard my shot flatten on the rock.

Raising a shout of warning, I reloaded, and resumed my watch. One of the beaters now approached, and at the same instant three roe emerged from the wood, and again retreated before I had time to fire. I could bear this no longer; so, running up to the spot at which they had disappeared, I entered the wood, determined to follow as quietly as possible, in the hopes that I might fall in with them again.

I had not made much progress among the irregular blocks of stone and the tissue of roots growing or decaying, when I caught

sight of the white rump of a roe just visible above the fern; but it was impossible to get a shot. Roe have a peculiar mode of running, with their heads stretched out and in a stooping posture, so that amongst fern of a moderate height nothing is visible but occasionally the white rump; and this was the case now. However, this occasional glimpse encouraged me, and I crept on as noiselessly as possible, though I was certain that the animal was aware of my vicinity, and was fleeing from me; and yet I was surprised that his flight was not more accelerated. But the distance between us now began to increase, and presently I lost all sight of him; when suddenly I was startled by the sharp report of a gun, and running forward found that the deer had emerged close by the boulder-stone, and had fallen to Walter's shot.

I found our friend in a mood curiously made up of anger and delight. Though delighted that he had killed, and been the first to kill, yet he was very much provoked with himself for having previously lost a magnificent opportunity. Three roe-deer had unexpectedly crossed his path abreast of each other; and in the hurry and flurry of the moment, while trying to single out one, he had allowed the whole to disappear without a shot. However, the sight of the one at his feet speedily restored him to good-humour. We now waited for the beaters, and then took measures for trying the second wood—the details of which I will not give, as they would prove little more than a repetition of what I have just written. We found the three roe again, and I put a charge of buckshot into one, which made him lick the dust. But, though we saw single heads more than once, we could not get near them; and, as it grew dusk, we left the shepherd in charge of the two slain, with directions to get them conveyed to the laird's,—his own cottage, and half-a-dozen able sons ready to aid in the task, being hard at hand; and ourselves, with Donald, started for a brisk walk of some five miles to the cottage where we were to pass the night, and where Sandy was to have some hot toddy and eatables ready for our arrival.

Tired though we were, our walk was a most enjoyable one. The evening was most lovely; though intensely hot in the low ground, an agreeable breeze played about the uplands. As the sun set, however, a few clouds made their appearance, gradually increasing and thickening; the whole heavens were coloured with the richest

variety of sunset hues. The west was in a perfect blaze, and everything assumed a ruddy tinge. Presently, however, we saw that the clouds grew darker and more threatening, and a most extraordinary lurid glare was cast on everything. The whole effect was such as I had never before witnessed, and grand in the extreme. It was now evident that a fearful storm was impending, and the thunder, at first distant and indistinct, rapidly drew nearer; and, as it rolled from hill to hill, and was echoed from side to side in each valley and ravine, the roar was completely overwhelming, and utterly beyond the power of language to depict.

We reached the cottage just as the first heavy drops were falling; and now succeeded one of the most fearful storms I ever beheld. The flashes of lightning, as they played about the mountain-sides, lit up each gully and ravine, and seemed to disclose each fissure in the face of every crag, while ever and anon deafening roars pealed forth, as though some huge mountain had fallen, rent and shivered by the storm. The pelting of the rain outside made us thankful that we were comfortably sheltered within; and when the storm gradually subsided, and a sweeping wind succeeded, Donald was in perfect raptures,—for that wind, he said, would drive the deer like sheep into some deep corrie, which he mentioned as near at hand, and sport would be certain on the morrow. With this cheering prospect therefore before us, we sat down to our supper; and, plain as were the viands, so much had our day's work sharpened our appetites, that had they been the choicest delicacies we could scarcely have enjoyed them more. We retired to rest, or rather lay down on a straw and heather pallet, in the same room, with the wind still howling,—having given directions to a shepherd, whose shieling stood at the end of our hut, that he should call us at the first appearance of dawn; for the corrie, and indeed every "neuk" and corner in the neighbourhood, having been very much disturbed of late, by the shepherds collecting their sheep, Donald was afraid that the deer would take an early departure from the sheltered ground, and make for the highest fastnesses in the hills.

Rorie, the shepherd, was true to his word, and roused us from our lowly beds (which, by the bye, we had found as comfortable as the best goose-down) just as the first faint streak of light appeared in the east. It was a chill morning; and, though we wrapped our

plaids closely round us, the wind seemed to pierce us through and through. We loaded the two guns and the rifle with ball—five barrels in all—and set off, Rorie taking the lead, as being the best acquainted with the ground, direct for the corrie. The pace was fearful; for to the Highland shepherd, inured as he is from his very infancy to fatigue and hardship, accustomed to climb the steepest hills as you or I, Jack, might walk the Strand—come of a hardy race, and himself naturally strong (for, as a Cumberland man once observed, "t' weak uns all die")—a walk across the hills, at a rate truly inconceivable by those who have not witnessed it, is an almost daily occurrence.

A most fatiguing march of three-quarters of an hour brought us to the edge of a cliff, from whence we looked down into the corrie (*Gaelicè*, Cohr an Dhu, *Anglicè*, the black corrie). It was not yet light enough to enable us to distinguish anything beyond the general features of the ground; so we sat down, wrapped in our plaids, and held a council of war. Beneath us lay Cohr an Dhu, with Loch an Dhu sleeping in its centre. Running round three sides of the loch was a broad border of green turf, and from this border the sides of the corie rose, in some parts gradually, in others precipitously. To the right was a gradually-sloping ascent leading to a pass, between two rocky summits, called "Bealloch Mohr," or the large pass; to the left, a pass, or deer-track, winding up through places apparently inaccessible, led to "Bealloch Beg," or the little pass. The wind was blowing straight from Bealloch Mohr into the corrie, so that the deer would be certain to wind us if we waited for them in that pass; whereas if we waited for them in Bealloch Beg, they would not wind us till they had passed our hiding-place. Rorie, however, was quite certain that the herd were in the constant habit both of entering the corrie at evening and leaving it in the morning by the unfavourable route Bealloch Mohr, and that if we waited the whole day we should see nothing of them in Bealloch Beg. We were thus thrown into a dilemma, whether on the one hand to risk our being winded by the deer, and to await their retiring by their accustomed route, or to have the wind in our favour, and run, as Rorie assured us, a very great chance of seeing no deer at all. The only other possible course was to stalk them while in the corrie. This, however, we shortly saw to be impracticable; for as it became lighter, and we gradually

began to distinguish moving objects, we counted nearly a hundred deer feeding about the shores of the loch, but in so exposed a position that we were sure we could never near them unperceived; and after a time we saw that they were slowly making towards Bealloch Mohr. Donald declared we could do nothing with them today. Rorie, the shepherd,—almost as inexperienced in deer-stalking as Walter and myself,—was for going at once to the Big pass, in spite of the wind, and there running our chance, in which view Walter and I coincided. Numbers, therefore, carried the day, and it was decided that we should do so; adopting, however, a suggestion of Donald's, that Rorie should go down into the corrie and show himself, so as to drive the herd, if possible, through our pass. Rorie therefore hurried off in one direction and we in another. A few minutes' climbing brought us to our position, behind a mass of rocks which had fallen from some cliffs above, and lying in the very centre of the pass, from whence we had a view straight down into the corrie. Here, carefully ensconced, we quietly awaited the event. We had not, however, watched long, when we saw Rorie coming towards the corrie, but on the further side of it, directly in the track leading to the other pass, so that the deer must take our pass or face him. In a few moments, Donald said, he would have reached a very narrow rent in the rocks, where he could show himself to the whole herd, and effectually stop their retreating in that direction, except over his body. While, however, Donald was telling this, we suddenly caught sight of the deer collecting together, evidently in alarm, about half a mile below us. "Am thenking they've 'e'en winded us," said Donald, and a moment's watching assured us that he was not mistaken; for, quickly forming into a compact mass, they trotted downhill back to the loch, which they speedily skirted, and then made for the narrow rent in the rocks, which they gained shortly before Rorie. We saw them emerge on the other side on an open moor, and then, making a slight detour as they met the shepherd, when not more than fifty yards from the chasm, they rushed pell-mell across the moor, and were soon lost to us, as they made for Bealloch Beg. Such was the provoking conclusion of our first attempt, owing entirely to our yielding to the advice of the shepherd and our own inexperienced ideas.

Donald and Walter began to soothe their disappointed feelings

with that everlasting resource, a pipe, while I mused over our misadventure, or noted the striking points of the scenery before us. Donald informed us that the chasm in the rocks, to which I have more than once alluded, was named in Gaelic after a spectre-hunter, whose favourite position it had been. He used to take his stand in the chasm in a kind of niche in the rock, and, as the deer jostled and drove each other past him, he would select the best, and, stabbing him with a long hunting-knife, extract the heart, that being his daily food, and leave the carcase for the wolf or the eagle. Donald added that, though he could not say how far there was truth in the tradition, he knew people whose fathers had themselves seen many a fine hart lying dead in the pass, slain by the spectre-hunter's knife.

The story was scarcely finished, the relation of which was much more impressive, from the language and looks of Donald, than I can make it, and I was just in the act of rising to stretch myself, when I was very roughly dragged down again by Donald, who at the same moment whispered in a low mysterious tone, "Bide a wee, Sir; bide a wee!" and, indeed, I was only too willing to take the hint, for within three hundred yards of us was a noble stag coming gaily up the brae, in perfect innocence of our vicinity. How he came there we could not conceive, but there he was; and, the wind having chopped round in the last few minutes, there was little danger of his winding us till he was at least within shot.

It was a most beautiful sight to see him throw up his head and snuff the air, and then scratch his side with his antlers, or crop the grass as he leisurely approached. My pulse began to beat quickly, and I saw that Walter too could ill disguise his nervousness. But we felt it was our only chance today, and we resolved to follow Donald's advice, to "be steady, and take him cannily." When within about two hundred yards, something behind him (which afterwards proved to be Rorie coming to join us) seemed to alarm his cervine majesty, and he began to trot, while Donald whispered to us not to fire till he was close. Onward he came, ever and anon looking back, and regardless of what was before him, till, when within about sixty yards, he suddenly winded us, and checked himself abruptly, as though puzzled what to make of the enemy visible behind and the new scent in front. In an instant my gun was

raised, I aimed before the shoulder-blade, and fired. The stag sprang high in the air, paused an instant, and then tore down the brae at a mad pace. Walter as yet had not fired, thinking my ball was enough; but on Donald's energetically bidding him to fire, he sent two almost random balls after the stag, one of which broke a fore leg, and the noble beast fell over, never to rise again. My ball had passed (as we afterwards found) through the fleshy part of his heart, and thus, though not instantly, caused his death. He was indeed a noble beast—six points on one antler, five on the other—and proud we were of our success, though it had come so late. Walter and I struck across the hills at once for the cottage, to take our breakfast, leaving the three men to follow at their leisure with the stag.

Thus, Jack, you see that though our inexperience led us into an egregious blunder, which spoiled our sport, yet we have learnt a lesson that will deter us from committing it again; and I hope my next, which shall follow in a few days' time, will bear accounts of more judgment on our part, and proportionate success.



LETTER III.

My last brought you up to the death of my first stag; mine, I say, for mine was the shot which really proved fatal, though Walter actually laid him low. But, unsatisfactory as it was that we could neither of us entirely claim the glory as his own, the emotions of the moment of victory were a sufficient reward for all our toil.

On reaching the cottage we found a breakfast, prepared by the cleanly wife of the shepherd. The Scotch poor as a body are, I admit, anything but particular as regards cleanliness; but in the most remote Highland regions they are frequently cleanly, unassuming, and moral; and a better specimen it would be difficult to find than Rorie's wife. Having made the most of the opportunity for replenishing the "inner man," we lay down once more on our couch of heather and straw, to make up for the scanty allowance of sleep we had enjoyed during the past night, and in imagination were soon dreaming of the deer, and re-enacting our late performance.

After about four hours' repose, we were aroused by the arrival of our two gillies and the shepherd, with the carcase of the stag. We found ourselves so much refreshed, that we were anxious to lose no time in setting out and searching for any straggling deer which might be lying about the neighbourhood. The main herd, Donald assured us, had betaken themselves to their usual place of retreat during the day,—some almost inaccessible heights about five miles from the cottage; and therefore there was no chance of our seeing them at present, unless it might be as they returned to the corrie in the evening. The air, however, was so mild and still, that there seemed little probability of their descending from the heights; and our only hope of sport, therefore, depended upon any solitary deer which might be lying about. Tired as they were, the gillies were

ready and anxious to join us, and show the way; but this we would not hear of. Accordingly, getting all the information we could from them, and giving them express orders to take some repose in our absence, Walter and I set out to try our skill and fortune alone. I had my rifle, he his "dooble-barrel;" and, from the little experience we had already gained, we determined that nothing should induce us again to walk with the wind, or lose a second opportunity like the one I described in my last. Though it was by no means a fine day, being rather misty and damp, yet at the cottage we had left it very warm; but as we mounted to the higher ground, we found the breeze increasing in strength, until it eventually became a most cutting wind. We each had our glass, and resolved to lose nothing by carelessness. As we reached the head of each brae, we scanned every inch of ground in sight, with a perseverance that soon made our eyes ache to a most unpleasant degree. This operation was repeated again and again, but without success. At last, however, my eye fell upon a red-coloured object, apparently lying beneath a ledge of rocks. Walter also succeeded in bringing his glass to bear upon it; but at so great a distance was it that we could do no more than make out that it certainly moved.

While straining our aching optics upon this object, until fancy caused it to dilate and assume forms innumerable, it suddenly disappeared behind a rock beneath which it had been previously lying, and we saw it no more. There was no time now to be wasted. Whatever it might be, we could lose but little by following it up; and, should it prove to be a deer, we might yet be fully rewarded. Accordingly, we set off at a brisk pace, keeping a most careful lookout, but arrived within a couple of hundred yards of the rock without seeing anything more. We now began to proceed very cautiously, at times even creeping on our knees; and at length we reached the rock itself, crept round the end of it—and still nothing was visible. After a moment's survey, Walter detected the red object again, lying down as before, but still in so indistinct a position that nothing could we make of it. Again, therefore, we began cautiously to creep on our hands and knees; when suddenly I was startled by a loud hearty laugh proceeding from Walter, and on looking before me, instead of a deer, saw a fine red fox bounding away over the heather bearing off a grouse in his jaws.

Walter fired, but Reynard's life seemed charmed, and the ball flattened on a rock close by him. I then brought my rifle to my shoulder, and, taking a very deliberate aim, doubled him up. We were tempted to slay him, not only in revenge for the disappointment he had caused us, but from the accounts Donald had given us of his destructiveness. Scotch foxes are longer in the leg, and altogether stronger, than their brethren south of the Tweed, though I believe Welsh foxes are very similar; and in the severe weather they are very daring in their attacks on the sheep; so that, besides avenging ourselves for the trick played upon us by our vulpine enemy, we had also done no slight service to the shepherd.

Such, Jack, was our first independent "stalk." You may, as no doubt you will, enjoy a good laugh at our "gullibility;" but we do not yet profess to be more than tyros, and we must, like other learners, be dealt with leniently in our early blunders, or you will crush our communicativeness in the bud, and hear no more from the "Land o' Cakes." Bear with me therefore patiently, while I promise you something better is coming.

On turning over the carcase of our fox, and robbing him of his brush, which we purposed carrying off as a trophy in memory of our first unaided attempt at deer-stalking, we began to examine the bearings of the compass, and make out our position. From what we recollected of the general features of the ground from the view we had had in the morning, we came to the conclusion that we could not be very far from the pass through which the herd of deer took their way after leaving Cohr an Dhu, and so we at once set off in what we judged to be the right direction. Our opinion was soon confirmed; for, on passing over some soft ground, we found the marks of deer almost as thick as though a flock of sheep had gone by; and, from the way in which the earth was torn up, it was evident that they must have been going at a rapid pace.

These tracks therefore we followed, and presently we found ourselves in a pass between two mountain summits, leading into a hollow, on the far side of which was, we imagined, the favourite retreat spoken of by Donald. Here the wind was most violent, sweeping up the brae and whistling round us, as though it would tear the very plaids from our shoulders. No deer were visible; but, clinging to the hope that the gale might again bring them to seek

shelter in the corrie, we seated ourselves behind a rock in the very centre of the pass, resolved to watch for a time at least. Evening was drawing on apace, and if they came at all they would come soon. The wind now gradually increased in violence, so that when we occasionally stepped from the shelter of the rock, and exposed ourselves to its force, we found it almost more than we could do to stand against it. This, however, we reasonably regarded as in our favour, for we were quite sure that no deer could wind us with that breeze in our teeth. For near an hour we remained in this position, Walter brooding over his pipe, and snugly enveloped in his plaid, while I kept constantly casting an eye down the brae, until my aching sight forced me to desist. At length it began to grow dark, and we to despair; but, while peering down into the dim shades of the glen below, I fancied I saw something move. I looked again, and again I thought it must be so. I called Walter, who suggested something about another fox. But in spite of his doubts, he too came to look, and confirmed my hopes,—there certainly was a moving object, and what was more, moving towards us; but, though behind us, the sun was still above the horizon, the shade cast over the glen by the mountain to our right was too deep to be pierced, and our patience had yet to be tried a little longer.

Presently, however, to our delight, we distinctly saw a deer. We scarcely dared to trust our sight; but there it undeniably was, and, as it slowly mounted the brae, we made out, one by one, seven-and-forty others, following in the wake of their leader,—a sight which effectually restored our flagging spirits.

Our position was a most admirable one. The whole width of the pass was not more than 200 yards, and the rock behind which we were stationed rose up in the very centre of the narrowest part, commanding a view far down into the glen before us, and over the whole of the sloping side of the hill, except a space of perhaps a hundred yards, which was hidden by a ledge of rock running across the brae like a bar. Step by step we watched the whole herd ascend. There were three stags, with good heads, which mingled with the rest; but one majestic hart kept ever a pace ahead of all, as though "the monarch of the glen" deigned not to mix among the common herd. The rest were either "yeld hinds" (those who this season have

borne no calf), or hinds followed by their calves, which "skipped like young goats" as they sprang from rock to rock.

Our object was to remain concealed, if possible, until their noble leader had passed us, and then to shoot him; or at least, not to fire at him until he had advanced too far to be able to retreat down the brae again,—in which case, our shot being unheard amid the howling and whistling of the gale, the rest would follow unsuspecting, and we might then each single out a head for ourselves.

The deer were now disappearing one by one beneath the above-mentioned ledge of rock which barred the brae, and we expected each moment the appearance of their chief; but, after watching most anxiously for some time, and nothing coming in view,—the whole herd being now lost beneath the bar of rock,—we grew uneasy lest they might have evaded us by some unseen path, and foolishly, most foolishly, left our position, admirable as it was, to creep forward to the rocky bar, and catch a glimpse of what was going on below. Between us and the bar was an open grassy sward, traversed by a small burn, down the course of which we began to creep very cautiously, the banks not being high enough to conceal us. It was but a short distance—not more than fifty yards at the most—but it took some time to get over it in the crouching position we were obliged to assume. Before we had passed more than half over the space Walter and I were side by side, stealing along as best we might on all fours, when some object flashed suddenly across the corner of my eye; and, turning my head, I beheld the "monarch of the glen" within sixty yards of me. At the same instant he either winded us or caught sight of us, I know not which; but, with a snort and a kind of plunge, he struck his hoofs into the soil, drew himself up, and gazed proudly around, as though to make out his enemy. At this instant, whispering to Walter not to move—an injunction which he fortunately seemed at once to comprehend—I raised my rifle, rested my elbow on Walter's shoulder, aimed just behind the shoulder-blade direct for the heart, and fired. Turning round, the deer plunged, or rather staggered, for a few paces down the brae, and then, apparently recovering, went away at a mad pace through the whole herd, which at first stood puzzled at the sudden flight of their leader (for the discharge of a gun is quite lost among the rocks if there be a pretty strong

breeze), and then gradually collected and followed him, until all were lost in the "shades below." Walter ran forward to get a shot, but did not succeed, every head of deer being far down and out of reach before he could gain the bar. And now how much we repented having left our first position! By impatiently coming forward and exposing ourselves, we had got *one* shot, it is true; but we had lost all the others, which might, and in all probability *would*, have offered themselves; and, what was still worse, we had driven away the whole herd as they were returning to the corrie, and so destroyed all prospect of sport on the morrow. However, we were quite certain that the stag was severely wounded; and, having reloaded, we set off down the brae, hoping that we might find him somewhere exhausted and stationary, and, if so, decide his fate by another bullet. We saw traces the whole way of the frantic leaps and mad plunges of the affrighted herd; and when about half a mile down we both suddenly paused. Walter threw up his cap (which, by the by, he found some difficulty in recovering, the wind having carried it over a somewhat rapid burn, with glassy slippery banks), and I gave a most vociferous cheer; for before us lay the noble stag, "magnificent in death:" weakened by the loss of blood, blinded by pain and approaching death, till he had become unable to check himself or guide his failing steps, he had fallen over a rock, and, gashing his shoulder with a long deep wound, had sunk upon his head and died with his horns buried in the turf. And at last, single-handed, I had killed my deer. Being without our gillies, it was of course out of the question to carry the stag to the cottage; so, leaving it as we found it, we set off in high spirits, and with a high wind to our backs, and the elation of success to buoy us up, we soon climbed the brae, and the rest of the way lying chiefly downhill, an hour and a half's brisk walking brought us to our quarters for the night. Donald during our absence had caught a dish of beautiful trout from the stream running from Loch an Dhu, which passed near the cottage; and these, with a small steak taken from the deer slain in the morning, proved a most pleasing variety to our repast. After informing them of our success, we arranged that the gillies and the shepherd should set off early the next morning, to bring in the slaughtered deer which we had left, and that we should then leave the forest for the present, and shoot our way home to the

Laird's, only making a slight *detour*, to give Walter one more chance of finding a deer in a lone glen which we had not yet disturbed, and to which they occasionally resorted when driven from their more frequented haunts. Having thus settled the proceedings of the morrow, and disposed of our parting tumblers of usquebaugh, we severally sought our pillows. When we again awoke to consciousness, the "rosy-fingered morn" had long ushered in the day; and a lovely day it was. The sun was rising high in the heavens, not a speck or cloud visible in the whole sky, the swollen burns of the previous day had nearly returned to their ordinary dimensions, presenting a lace-like appearance as they spread their diminished waters over the cliffs, where but yesterday were broad sheets of foam stretching down the mountain-sides wherever a channel could be found. We left the cottage shortly before noon, and, giving the rifle to Donald, betook ourselves across the moors, gun in hand, for Glen-nam-haidh (the heavenly valley), where Donald thought there was a possibility of finding a deer for Walter. On the way we brought down $4\frac{1}{2}$ brace of grouse, $2\frac{1}{2}$ falling to Walter's gun, and 2 to mine. As we were descending a brae, I saw some dark-looking object swiftly stealing over the ground beneath us, which I could not distinctly make out. It soon came nearer, when Donald pronounced it to be a golden eagle. As it sailed steadily along, our vicinity seemed to cause no alarm; but at length, when within perhaps 100 yards, it rose rapidly in the air, wheeled majestically round and round as it soared higher and higher, until at last, when almost lost to view, we saw it joined by its mate, and then both struck off in a straight line toward some mountain summits in the distance.

This was my first introduction to the king of birds in his native regions; and delighted I was to have seen what will soon, I fear, be numbered among "the things that were." Though in general but little more destructive than many of the larger classes of hawks, a war of extermination is being waged against this noble bird. In many instances the reward of a guinea is offered for every eagle brought dead or alive to the keepers; and this, with the large price which may be obtained from the bird-stuffers for either the bird itself or its eggs, proves a great incentive to all who can climb a cliff or bear a gun; from which combined causes the

number of these birds is fast diminishing. I have said the eagle is not generally more destructive than the larger hawks. This as a rule is true; but he has greater powers than they, and occasionally he exerts them. In general, perched on some rocky height, or soaring high in the clouds, he beholds with kingly indifference the petty scenes of earth. Capable of passing through the whole length and breadth of the country in a few short hours, the disturbances and changes of any one particular region have no effect upon him. Contented, in general, with making his meal on the mountain-hare or the ptarmigan of his native height, he but seldom disturbs man; and man, in turn, were it not for the temptation of gold, need seldom disturb him. If he do occasionally vary the monotony of his life of royal solitude by a foray on the sheepfold or elsewhere, might it not be overlooked, for the sake of preserving one of the greatest ornaments associated with these mountainous regions?



Donald has several stories of the eagle, which he has related to us as we were wandering among the hills together. On one occasion an eagle was seen struggling violently with some other animal on the surface of a pool. Donald's father chanced to be near with a gun, and, thinking that he might possibly get a salmon for his supper, he shot the eagle, and at the same time, to his surprise,

killed a large otter; the eagle's talons being so deeply imbedded in its back that the two could not be separated. Now and then a lamb is carried off; but this is a comparatively rare occurrence,—the fox being a much more deadly enemy. Within the last fortnight, however, an eagle has done very serious damage in a neighbouring strath. Pouncing suddenly on a foal, while roaming on the hillside with its mother, the bird plunged its talons into the eyes of the poor creature, which in its terror rushed headlong over a precipice, and was at once killed by the fall. Such displays of his power, however, as these are exceedingly few and far between. While therefore it might be advisable to prevent their frequent occurrence, by keeping down the number of eagles below certain limits, it seems cruel and unjust to extirpate or banish from our island so noble a relic of its ancient state of savage wildness. To me the Highlands will lose much of their grandeur and charms when the eagle exists only in their legends and reminiscences.

At length we reached our destination, Glen-nam-haidh; and a spot more worthy of its name was seldom trodden by the foot of man. In shape resembling a horseshoe rather elongated, the valley forms a kind of amphitheatre; the sides, running up to the height of 1800 feet, and at the curved end rising very abruptly, are lined with birch copses. Above the glen, on the very top of the hill, is a mountain loch, called in Gaelic "the frozen loch;" and from this issues a stream, the waters of which glide down a deep fissure in the face of a huge black rock, forming a waterfall about 70 feet high, and then tumble and dance over a series of cascades far into the depths of the dell. In the centre of the last cascade, with the waters leaping on either side of it, stands a jet-black stone, in its form somewhat resembling a rude cross, to which the legends of the glen have attached the sobriquet of "Uaigh-na-sithchean," or, "the tomb of the fairies." And, certainly, though our common notions of those creatures would assign to them the gift of immortality; yet, if they must, like frail humanity, also pay their debt to nature, this is a most suitable spot wherein to lay their elfin bones,—a rock, blackened by the spray of ages, fringed round by the foxglove and the fern, while above wave the long drooping branches of a weeping birch, bending over the rude cross and fretting with the stream that murmurs by.

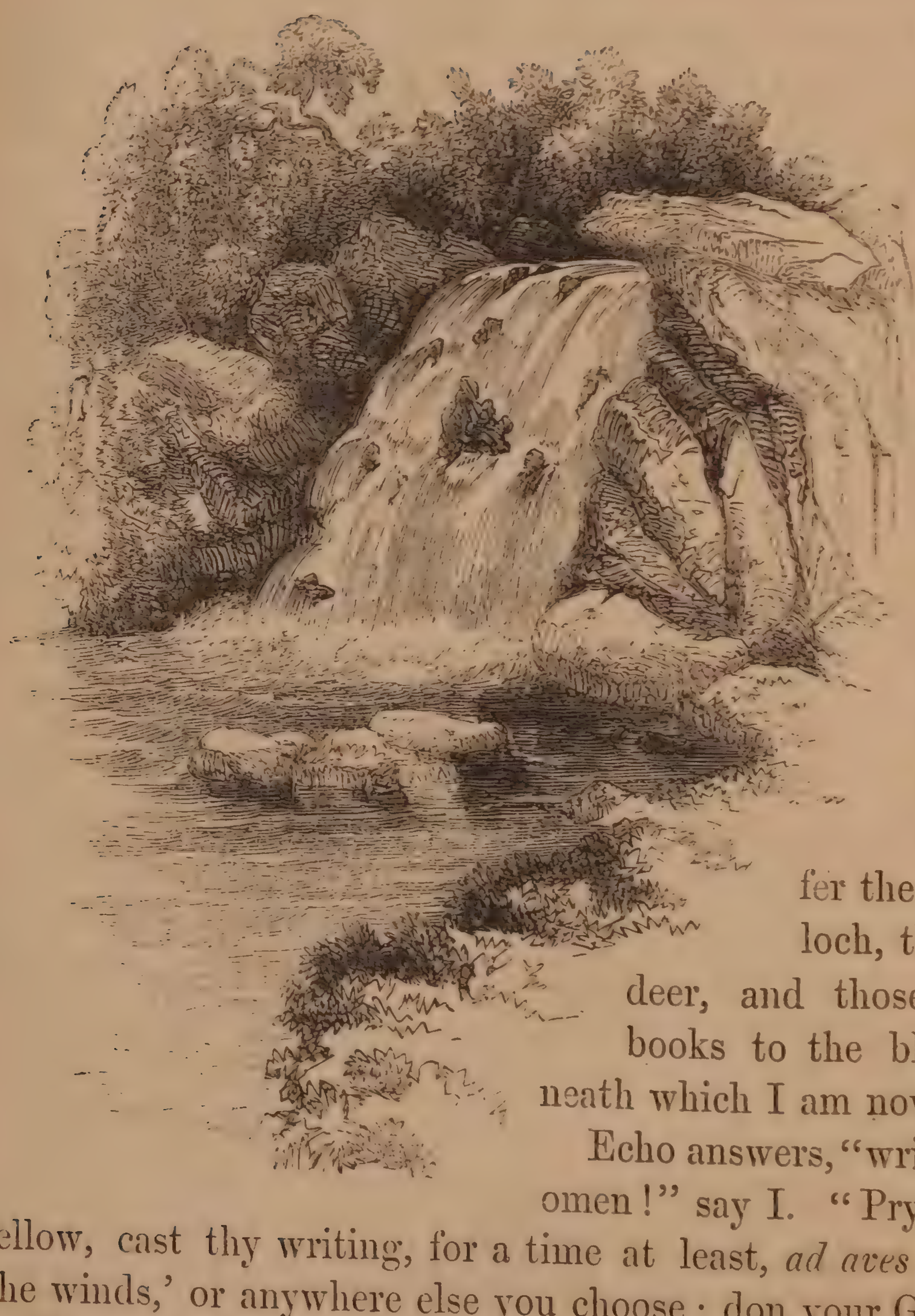
Such is but a meagre description of the lovely spot to which we had directed our steps in search of more deer. Our search however proved futile. Stationing ourselves at the head of the waterfall, just where the burn issues from Loch-an-reodhadh, we carefully examined every glade where a deer was likely to be, but nothing was visible. The copses themselves, though thoroughly adapted for roedeer, seemed too dense for the red-deer; and Donald assured us that, though he had seen many a fine buck in the open glades, he had never found one within the coverts. We thought it best, therefore, to be content with the achievements we had already performed; and accordingly, having sauntered through the prettiest part of the glen, and moistened our lips with a draught of pure "mountain dew," we proceeded homewards, following as far as it lay in our road the course of the burn; for Scotch streams are dainty creatures, generally picking out the prettiest bits of scenery, and Alt-na-airgst (the silver burn) is no exception to the rule. At first our course wound about among birch-trees, meeting over the stream, and spreading some little way up the brae on either side; interspersed with juniper bushes (the berry of which, by-the-by, I was surprised to find not at all unpalatable) and a thick layer of ferns below, capable of covering any amount of black game, which, by Donald's account, are numerous there; but, having no dog with us, we only saw one cock, which Walter brought down at full eighty yards. While he was reloading, we were provoked at seeing a roebuck steal away in alarm at the shot, but at a distance sufficiently great to secure him from our guns. We watched him springing lightly from rock to rock as he mounted the hillside, until he disappeared in a gully; and then, resuming our route, we presently passed beneath the finest craig I ever beheld,—a huge mountain mass of rock rising perpendicularly to the height of 1100 feet, its face almost as flat as a wall, save where immense blocks, some of them as large as a three-storied house, had been loosened by the thaws of spring, and fallen to the ground below. The bottom of the glen was strewed with these huge fragments, some half buried in the soil, others shivered or cracked by the fall. Donald took us to one spot, where an assemblage of these, piled hap-hazard together as they had fallen, had formed a large cavern, within which a flock of sheep might safely find shelter. The name of this

cliff is Creag-an-islair, or the craig of the eagle, from the fact of an eagle having, from time immemorial, had its eyrie in a large cleft near the top. As we passed the foot, numbers of hawks were wheeling about its face, and a constant clamour was kept up as they came in hostile contact. The scenery now became gradually of a more tame character; and an hour's stiff walking brought us once more to the Laird's, where we found a hearty welcome and kind inquiries as to our success.

On the whole then, though we had been guilty of many blunders, our first bag was a very creditable one,—2 red-deer, remarkably fine heads, 2 roe, 4½ brace of grouse, a black-cock, and last, though not the least important, a fox and a gled; which, I think you will admit, was very fair as a first essay.

P.S. We are momentarily expecting Sandy to arrive with the two deer, slung over a pony. If you like, I promise you one of my first two "heads."

LETTER IV.



HAVE my past accounts contributed anything towards the shaking your "Sassenach" predilections? and is there any hope of our yet welcoming you to the land of the Gael? or are you still resolved to prefer the ledger to the loch, the desk to the deer, and those hateful blue books to the blue welkin beneath which I am now writing.

Echo answers, "writing." "Absit omen!" say I. "Prythee, my good fellow, cast thy writing, for a time at least, *ad aves et bestias*, 'to the winds,' or anywhere else you choose; don your Galashiels, your 'sou'-wester,' and your 'waterproofs;' come hither as fast as steaming engine and reeking horses can bring you; and, bidding defiance to the storm, the mist, and the elements in general, learn what it is to breathe the mountain air, to drink the mountain dew,

and to handle to some purpose the rifle and the rod, among the noblest game, by land or flood, of which our bonnie isle can boast."

After the expedition recorded for your benefit in my last, our limbs, and above all our feet, unaccustomed as they had been to such exertion, needed repose; and for two or three days we curbed our roaming propensities, and amused ourselves within the immediate neighbourhood of the Laird's house.

An arm of the sea running some miles inland is within half a mile of us, affording at times very good salt-water fishing, as well as being frequented by many varieties of wild-fowl, which build their nests and rear their young in the neighbouring cliffs. It is, however, only in the winter that they resort hither in any great numbers, for the sake of shelter from the storms that rage in that season almost incessantly without the bay, in consequence of the conflicting nature of the currents off these northern coasts.

At such times almost every variety of sea-bird may be found, and occasionally large shoals of whales may be seen ploughing the stiller water of the loch, and playing their fountains in every direction. Porpoises and seals too are numerous; but the coast is so dangerous, from the height of the cliffs and the hidden rocks, which crowd the shore, that boats seldom venture out in quest of sport unless in a perfect calm.

Our friend the Laird has a large collection of eggs, some of them very rare, gathered chiefly by Donald, at the risk of life and neck, from the rocks and caves on the coast. A curious circumstance, which however seems well authenticated, is, that many birds, by a wonderful provision of nature, can produce their eggs of a colour corresponding to that of the place in which they are deposited. A guillemot, for instance, will lay eggs on a chalk cliff, white speckled with black; but if her nest be on the seaweeds, the eggs will be green with black spots, varying in shade according to circumstances; and thus she is the more able to baffle the quick sight of those numerous enemies to whom her eggs are daintiest fare.

The second day of our rest proving a very fine one, and our limbs being still too stiff and our feet too sore to admit of walking to any great extent, we were induced by the glowing accounts of Donald to try the salt-water fishing. Accompanying him, therefore, down

to a small group of buildings close to the beach,—amongst which (there being two or three cottages of dependants) we found a species of storehouse, wherein were oars, sails, anchors, and everything requisite for boating, the boats themselves lying on the beach ready for use,—we selected one of a moderate size, suited for four oars; and enlisting in our service a lad with a very knowing look, who lived in one of the cottages hard by, we speedily launched our vessel; and when Donald had brought down the requisite tackle, we stepped on board from a pier of nature's own making, and each taking his oar began our voyage. Our destination was a rocky promontory, jutting out into the sea, on the far side of the loch, and about four miles distant. The water there, Donald said, was deep, and at the flowing tide fish were "unco' many."

The weapons of our warfare were somewhat curious: a rod consisting of two very stiff pieces of hazel, spliced so as to make a whole about six feet long; and a line about eight feet in length, made of horsehair, clumsily twisted together, but sufficiently thick to be very strong. On this line, at intervals of about a foot, were fastened by trebled gut large white fly-hooks, three or four in number. The mode of fishing was also new to us. The rod was thrust into the water, close beside the boat, in a vertical position, head downwards, so as to cause the flies to float about a couple of feet below the surface, and held in that position while the boat continued its motion. An hour's steady pulling brought us to our point, without any occurrence worthy of mention, except that (having also brought our guns) we stopped occasionally to fire at a chance sea-fowl, as he floated unconcernedly by—with only one exception, however, unsuccessfully. We found it most difficult to kill, from the quickness with which such birds can dive beneath the surface, as well as from the amount of shot they will carry. We saw the feathers fly from more than one as we fired, but quicker than thought they had disappeared under-water, and presently rose a few yards further from us, apparently uninjured. One or two others fell, after flying some distance, but too far off for us to follow. An oyster-catcher was the only bird we secured, Walter bringing it down as it passed over us in fancied security.

Arrived at the promontory, Walter and I armed ourselves with the tackle above described, and, leaving Donald and his coadjutor

Angus to row slowly forward, we took our seats on the opposite sides of the boat, thrust our rods down in the approved manner, and anxiously awaited the event. We found it more difficult than we had anticipated to hold our rods vertically against the force of the current, and our arms soon began to ache rather unpleasantly; and, as we tried patiently for some time without success, we began to fear that either we had misunderstood Donald, or that he had been making a wrong use of English in his descriptions of the sport to be expected. But just as Walter had begun to hint his suspicions to this effect, he was agreeably surprised by a jerk at his rod, and he quickly pulled into the boat a very lively fish, about a foot long, which Donald pronounced "a cuddy." At the same instant I felt one on my line, and, before I could get him into the boat, a second had hooked himself. For a quarter of an hour or more we were both occupied in constantly pulling these little fellows wriggling into the boat—frequently two at a time. At first we found it amusing, but the interest subsided as they became so numerous; and, when we had caught nearly two score between us, Walter handed his rod over to Angus, and himself took an oar. I was about to follow his example, and exchange occupations with Donald, when a most vehement tug at my rod, which had nearly carried it bodily away, once more aroused my energies. Whether it were a whale or a porpoise, or what, I could not tell; but he was hooked securely, and fought most savagely. It was like having a salmon on one's hook, with no winch or line to let out; and had not the tackle been very good indeed, it must of necessity have given way. Rowing was now suspended, and Walter rose from his oar to watch the progress of the contest. After diving, plunging, pulling obstinately, and trying every device for nearly ten minutes, my fish gradually gave in, suffered himself to be drawn alongside, and Donald lifted him exultingly into the boat. He proved to be what is here called "a lithe," though what his proper name may be I do not know. His length was a little under a yard; and Donald said he would weigh eight pounds.

Walter now returned to his rod, in the hopes of catching a fish of the same sort and size as mine; and, as we had during the struggle imperceptibly drifted away with the tide, we at once pulled back to the spot where I had hooked him. Donald was sure that where there had

been one there would be more, and so it proved; for we had scarcely passed the place, when at the same instant both the rods were tried to the utmost by a repetition of the same plunging, diving, and obstinate pulling. We kept up the fight for some time, as before; and most exciting sport it was. Walter, however, had secured his fish, and laid him gasping in the bottom of the boat, while mine was still resisting as obstinately and showing as much play as ever. Indeed, we began to think that I should never gain the mastery, while each moment threatened the rupture of my tackle. But at length, by dint of patient perseverance and cautious dealing, which called forth the expression of praise from Donald, "'Deed, sir, but I didna' ken ye could angle the like o' that," I drew in my antagonist, and found to my astonishment that, instead of one lithe, there were two, each fully as large as my first. The obstinacy of the struggle now no longer surprised us; the only wonder was that the tackle had held good. Walter's fish was scarcely so large as my first. We continued this for about an hour longer, and then, as the tide turned, we gave it up. We had each caught another lithe; and, on counting our fish, we found that we had fifty-six cuddies and five lithe, weighing, by Donald's calculation, altogether not far short of 100 lb. On the whole, then, we were very much pleased with the day's sport, which had more than satisfied our greatest expectations. The lithe, especially, were a most agreeable surprise; and I think, with a good rod and fine tackle, they would afford sport equal to that of any salmon. Few anglers, therefore, need be without enjoyment; the sea is open to every one, and I am told that there are plenty of these fish on all the rocky parts of the coast; so that those who are debarred from salmon-fishing need only turn to the lithe, and find amusement equally good. We now set our faces towards home, or rather our backs,—for we began to pull manfully against the ebb of the tide. We had occupied about an hour in coming; but, in returning, we found the current much stronger, and, in consequence, for some time made but little way, when suddenly our stroke (Donald) snapped his oar, and we were left with only three remaining to make our way across the loch, not far short of four miles, with a strong current against us. This was but a gloomy prospect for us, unequal as we had been, even at starting, to any great exertions; and, to make matters worse, the sky was clouding over, a slight

breeze had sprung up, which promised to be greater, and we could see that the centre of the loch was much more turbid than when we crossed it in the morning. There was nothing for it, however, but to make the attempt and do our best.

Donald now went to the stern, and by working his oar there helped to propel the boat, while Walter and I took the remaining pair of oars, each of us being occasionally relieved by Angus. In this manner we kept steadily on our course; and though in the middle of the loch we seemed for some time to be making no way at all, we succeeded, after a hard pull of nearly two hours, in regaining the pier from whence we had put out in the morning. The clouds had been meanwhile gathering; and though our passage had been latterly smooth enough,—for, after tacking across the loch, we had coasted the last two miles,—yet in the open part of the loch we saw that it was becoming sufficiently turbid to make us thankful that we had crossed so soon. As we neared the pier some heavy raindrops fell; and, these increasing, we were drenched to the skin before we reached the hospitable roof of our host. Our creel of fish were, after due inspection, speedily transferred to the kitchen, and the next morning we had the pleasure of seeing them all suspended in rows along a wall in the back yard, split open, salted, and left to dry in the sun. Cured in this manner they form a staple article of food among the poorer classes; and few cottages are to be seen without some dried haddocks, herrings, or cuddies hanging on their wall beneath the eaves of the roof. The rain continued during the whole of the following day; and we were confined to the house, except for about an hour in the evening, during a bright gleam, when we shot three hares and two brace and a half of teal.

The third morning being tolerably fine, though varied by an occasional shower, we drove to a river called the Frothay, to fish for salmon. This river is only about a mile in length, running from a fresh-water loch down into the sea. It would be a most excellent salmon river, were it not for the fishermen at the mouth, who net it so indefatigably that scarcely a fish can ascend the stream except during a flood. At such times, if there be a great body of water, they come up in great numbers, and the very best sport may be had. Throughout its whole extent it is one continued succession of rapids and falls; the stream bowling its way along a rocky bed,

huge boulders constantly impeding its course, and high cliffs rising abruptly on either side; so abruptly indeed, and so close to the water's edge, that the angler can in some places only make his way very cautiously, by steps cut in the rock. Altogether, from the bold character of the scenery, as well as from the rapidity and turbulence of its waters, the Frothay forms the *beau idéal* of a Highland stream; and I am acquainted with no river along whose course I could ramble with greater enjoyment.

After putting up our cattle, a pair of Highland ponies, with the dogcart, at a shepherd's shieling hard by, we put our tackle together, and hastened at once to try our fortune. We found the stream swollen, and were quickly assured of its containing fish, for we saw the fresh-run salmon leaping in every direction. This, however, was no agreeable sight; for when salmon are in the leaping mood, they are seldom disposed to take the fly. The water also was rather too much discoloured; but this we remedied in some degree by putting on a brighter fly. Donald selected for me one out of a number which he carried hooked into his bonnet; it was rather large in size, with a yellow body, ribbed with gilt, the wings of bright blue and orange.

Leaving Walter, with Sandy in attendance, Donald and I proceeded a little further down the stream, to a spot where we were to find both fish and sport, if they were to be had at all. But the spot deserves a description. There were three consecutive falls. Beneath each fall there was a pool; the uppermost and lowest being of great depth, the middle one but shallow.

Just as we arrived at the first pool, two salmon sprang up the fall, in their upward course, having already surmounted the two lower falls. One of the two failed, and, falling back again into the pool, disappeared in the dark abyss into which the roaring torrent was pouring itself. I threw my fly across the boiling current, and at my first cast a broad tail flapped on the surface, and sullenly disappeared. By Donald's advice, I then cast in another direction, so as to allow the fish I had just raised to recover himself; then, after a delay of two or three casts, I renewed the challenge, and before a minute had elapsed I had hooked my fish.

It had now begun to rain, and that very heavily; but I had an exciting contest before me, and I could not shrink from it. At

first the fish rushed, as though in amazement at the little fly which stung so sharply, down to the very bottom of the pool; but his enemy was not to be shaken off so easily. He then rose in the very centre of the boiling whirlpool beneath the fall, and attempted to dash up the fall itself, but fell back into the pool again. Still, however, the fly stuck closely to him, and, after pausing a moment, in the still water, he made a savage rush down the stream towards the second fall.

"Ye 'll lose him the noo ; ye 'll just be losing him !" cried Donald, in despair ; but there was no help for it ; I could not resist more strenuously, or my tackle must give way, and therefore I was fain to let him go gradually down, trusting to the chapter of accidents to save my credit. The rain was now coming down heavily ; in vain I had drawn my plaid tighter around me ; I was quickly wetted to the skin, and now each drop seemed to pierce through my clothes, and to make itself felt. The rocks, too, sloping upwards from the bed of the stream, at all times hard to stand upon, were now wet and slippery, and I found it most difficult to keep my footing.

Just as the fish disappeared over the second fall, and I sprang forward to keep up the battle, my feet slipped from under me; I rolled over backwards, falling with one shoulder and an arm in the stream, and my rod flew out of my grasp into the river.

In an instant Donald came to the rescue, and while he recovered the rod I regained my feet; and having no time to think about bruises or the additional wetting, I resumed my rod, and hurried forward, though somewhat more carefully. There was but small hope that my fish had not yet escaped, for several yards of the line had run out, while my rod was in the stream, and it was now quite slack. When I had scrambled down to the foot of the fall, I began to wind up the line as fast as I could, but felt nothing of my fish. At length I had nearly taken in the whole line, when, to my amazement and delight, a sudden rush and the consequent whizzing of the winch apprised me that he was still secure. And now succeeded a second combat, more severe by far than anything I had yet witnessed. The plunges of the fish were terrific, and his flights through the air perfectly wonderful, causing me continually to tremble for my tackle, especially as he seemed to be making for the third and last fall.

Donald now stole up to me, and, as though he were afraid of his own voice at such a crisis, in a low tone, approaching almost to a whisper, entreated me to hold him up the stream, and prevent his "ganging ow're the fa' that gait,"—advice which I would only too gladly have followed, had it rested with myself. But a fresh-run salmon is not so easily guided, especially if he has the start.

I now thought I saw symptoms of distress in the fish, and began to cherish hopes of a successful issue, when a sudden rush up the stream snapped the top of my rod into two pieces. I heard Donald groan as he said, "'Deed, sir, but ye 're unco misfortunate the day." However, in spite of this additional disadvantage, I persevered, and now the fish was evidently relaxing his efforts. But still, slowly and certainly, he was nearing the fall, and each short struggle lessened the distance. Could I but hold him up the stream a few minutes longer he would be mine; but when he was almost exhausted, and could have held out a very little longer, I had the mortification to see him, by a kind of tack in his course, work his way into the middle of the current, just at its most rapid part, where it narrowed before the cliff, taking a clear leap of twenty feet over the cliff which barred its passage. Nothing I could do could now secure him. My tackle was not stout enough to resist the strength of the current, and there was nothing for it but to give up all as lost.

Just, however, at this juncture, Donald's presence of mind and experience befriended me. Springing forward, he took his stand on a rock projecting some little way over the fall, and, coolly balancing himself in that dizzy position, put out the landing-net, and catching my fish in the very act of descending, brought and laid him in triumph at my feet. And so terminated the severest struggle I myself had experienced, and of which even Donald said, "I dinna mind a' graunder fight." The fish had several sea-lice upon his head, thus proving that he was just fresh from the sea: his weight was afterwards found to be rather under fourteen pounds.

After tendering my thanks to Donald for his timely aid, I sat down and watched him splice the top of my rod. The rain had ceased, and warm as I was from the excitement of the struggle, I did not feel the wet state of my clothes; and indeed the wind, which had sprung up as the rain ceased, soon blew me, comparatively speaking, dry again.

We continued the fishing for two or three hours longer, and returned home with five salmon and a sea-trout; my share of the spoil being three salmon, weighing altogether twenty-six pounds. Walter took two very good fish, weighing about seven pounds each, and the sea-trout of five pounds. All the fish were fresh from the sea; one of mine had a large slice taken out of his shoulder, having been bitten, as Donald said, by a seal. He must, therefore, have had a narrow escape. The Redburn, we are told, is in splendid order for fishing, and in my next I hope you will hear of our success there.

LETTER V.

You are indeed, my friend, impregnable. Like a hedgehog in his bristles, or a tortoise under his shell, you remain, I will not say "shell-proof," but letter-proof, *proof-impression* of any kind. Your stronghold a counting-house, besiege you as I may, you bid defiance to my attacks. *Quartered* to your own satisfaction, unaspiring loon, you are not to be *drawn* at any price. To be drawn, I mean, in the sense in which the word is used by that pseudo, and now, (thank Heaven for it!) fast disappearing class of the genus sportsman, the badger-baiter.

Impervious to argument, a very whale encased in his blubber, no missives of mine can penetrate your vitals, or rouse you from your mercantile apathy.

If nothing else can do it, will not at least these vile attempts at wit, which I have just been perpetrating, wake up the dormant fire—for fire I know there is—that slumbers beneath that smoke-dried exterior? If not, why I too, like a sulky snail, must e'en draw in my horns, wrap me up in self, and abandon you to your fate as an unqualified and incurable cockney. The shyest salmon could not be more difficult to hook. Vary and paint the fly as I will, adorn it with every hue and shade, you will not take my bait. The wariest deer could not be harder to drive from his native fastness (*slowness*, I take it in your case), than you are to draw from your wooden tripod. But *linguæ faveas*,—mark my words, Jack, my last protest is made. "Thus far, and no further," is my motto, and henceforward I shall content me with barely recording the daily events of a Highland life; that if I may not induce you to join in it, I may at least enliven the dull monotony of an existence which, though frequently occupied "on change," knows no variety, and whose noblest energies and greatest activity are spent "on the stocks."

So heavy a rain followed the events related in my last, that on visiting the Redburn we found it, as Donald had predicted, of a colour and composition very closely resembling those of the fag-end of the coffee-pot which has been "well shaken before taken." Fishing, therefore, was out of the question; and accordingly we proceeded, at the suggestion of Donald, to while away the morning by a visit to an odd character, whose dwelling was at no great distance, beneath a huge cliff called "Creag an Eoghlevagh." In former times a forester in the service of a princely nobleman, whose vast estates have long since been brought to the hammer and passed to other hands, he had known the hills, now tenanted only by sheep, in those days occupied by nothing but the red deer, the roe, the fox, and other wild game. He "minded weel" the day when seven fine stags were shot on one morning, just beneath the present position of his cottage, though nowadays they are seldom seen within six or seven miles of it. Since the dispersion of the property, and his own consequent dismissal from office, he had led an irregular and almost lawless life. There were rumours that he had been connected with the "smuggling interest," and he was known to have been an extensive poacher; but he had been openly detected or convicted of neither. Within the last few years, however, as the natural burdens of an age now bordering closely on a century became heavy upon him, he had given up his questionable occupation, and kept to his home, like an honest man.

Crammed to the muzzle with old recollections, legends, and experiences, to those who could listen and comprehend, his recitals of bygone scenes and days were full of interest; but, unfortunately for us, he prided himself on his Gaelic; and possessed of a melancholy presentiment that the day was not far distant when the tongue of the Southron was to supersede it altogether, Rob treasured the language of his Celtic forefathers with so jealous a watchfulness, that he would not himself give utterance to a syllable of English if he could avoid it, that at least his own conscience might be clear from the guilt of having cast off an old and valuable friend, and having lent a hand towards blotting out one from the Babel-born family of tongues. We had been told by our friend the Laird that to hear Rob recite an adventure in his native language was to listen to a

recital in both the language and the spirit of Ossian, but that this we should in a great measure lose in the English interpretation.

Donald however gave us to understand that, under the influence of a modest amount of whisky, the spirit of this aged Gael might be induced to lay aside its jealousy of the Sassenach, and indulge us in English as good as that our "ainsels" could use,—a hint which we resolved to profit by.

On reaching the shieling where Rob abode, which was a long low hut, with thick heather thatch, and a chimney built of sods,—the whole erection looking more like a stack of peat than a human habitation,—we entered, and were introduced by Donald. Rob rose from his seat, bade us a Gaelic welcome, and invited us to sit down, pointing to a long clumsily-made trunk-box, over which he threw an antique plaid. We took the seat allotted to us; and while Donald and our host were conversing in a jargon incomprehensible to us, I had leisure to look about me.

The interior of the cottage, like Highland shielings in general, was walled round with rude rafters of pine, well seasoned by peat smoke, with which same smoke the atmosphere of the apartment was unpleasantly overcharged. One side of the room was composed almost entirely of doors,—the centre ones being, I suppose, the folding doors of the bedroom or closet where the occupant slept; the others opening into cupboards and *omnium gatherum* whatnots. A huge fireplace—*Gaelicè, tein-tein*—occupied nearly the whole of one end of the apartment, the peat lying smouldering on the hearth in the true primitive fashion; and above the rough-hewn stone mantelpiece was suspended an old flint gun, towards which the eyes of Donald were ever and anon directed with a look of devout reverence. The third side was occupied with the door and one small window, through the glass of which, though sufficiently transparent to admit the light in scant measure, no objects could possibly be distinguished. The remaining side was overhung with the drapery (still in character) of sundry time-hallowed coats, weather-worn plaids, faded bonnets, and huge boots.

Our host himself was a man of middle height, now much bent by years; his countenance, however, notwithstanding the many deep furrows graven by the hand of time, had an appearance much

younger than accorded with his actual age, from the ruddy hue which still mantled the cheek, and the bright glitter which still flashed from the eye. His locks, white as the driven snow, straggled at random over his shoulders, and his long grey whiskers joined in the same stream. His huge bony hands and broad shoulders still bore testimony to the strength he had once possessed; and as he drew himself up stiffly to his full height, his whole appearance was striking, and even imposing.

As he moved about the shed, I observed that he slightly halted on one leg; and on inquiring of Donald the cause, I was informed that he had been injured in poaching a deer; but that if we would produce our whisky flasks and "bide our time," we might have the account of it from his own lips. Our usquebagh therefore produced, we drank to each other; and while Walter and Donald each added a pipe to their draught, Rob offered to me his snuff-box. Snuff-taking has been a habit in the Highlands for many generations, and though with the rising one smoking has become so general, as almost to supplant the more ancient fashion, yet many of the most primitive in these unfrequented districts still cling tenaciously to "the old paths." Rob's snuffbox was itself a curiosity, as an article of home manufacture, a deer's hoof forming the box, while the lid was composed of a strip of hart's horn. For some time all communications were carried on in Gaelic, Donald acting as interpreter; but *in vino veritas* is an adage old and well tested withal, and as the whisky warmed the cockles of that aged heart, and thawed the frigid exterior, it evoked the powers of speech, not yet asserted; and at length the Gaelic oracle, throwing aside his reserve, poured forth his responses in fluent English. "What for was he lame? 'Twas just nacthing more than a fulish fall owre a craig wi' a stag he had wounded." And then he proceeded to tell us how, when on a poaching venture, he had watched the beast grazing in security above a high crag; how he had stalked it, wounded it mortally, and brought it to the ground; how, in his haste lest any of the keepers should unpleasantly interrupt him, he had then run in upon the deer to "gralloch," or stab it to the heart, thinking it to be at its last gasp; and how he was unpleasantly surprised, on grasping an antler, to find the beast sufficiently vigorous to spring blindly forward; and how, before there was time to extricate himself, both

he and the deer, the slayer and the slain, had rolled over the precipice together, and after a most marvellous but unpleasant succession of falls, thumps, struggles, and bruises, both lay breathless at the foot of the crag. The deer, having fortunately fallen undermost, had broken the force of the shock to him, which however had been so severe as to fracture his leg. "But," said he, "I sune drew his life's blood; and there," he added, "is his head," pointing to a deer's mask on the wall, "which I hae keepit, and shall aye keep to my dying day." We examined the head, which however was not remarkable for its size; though, no doubt, for old association's sake, it was worth more to him than "siller or gowd."

"But, Rob," asked Donald, "winna ye just tell the gentleman about the big stag ye were three days in the killing?"

"'Deed, will I," was the gracious reply. But here, Jack, you must allow me to give the story in my own words. To recall those of Rob would be too serious a task; and therefore, though I know that half the charm will thereby be lost, I must e'en leave it to your own fertile imagination to put in the finishing strokes and effective touches of the master, while I barely lay down the crude outline. Allow us one moment for a preliminary pull at the flask and a pinch of snuff—not at all adulterated; oh no!—and we begin at once our narrative of the big stag of Ben Rhynie.

Once upon a time there was a famous hart known to frequent the fastnesses of Ben Rhynie, the head of which was for a long while an object of ambition among all the foresters, sportsmen, and poachers who shot *per fas aut nefas* in the neighbourhood. But he seemed to bear a charmed life,—not even a bullet of silver, it was said, could harm him; and he continued, in spite of their patience and perseverance, to baffle them all.

On one occasion, however, Rob had been out with his gun, tempted as well by the want of something to do, as by a great desire for a venison steak for his next day's (Sabbath) dinner. He had searched various woods for roe, but without success, and was wending his way homeward, his gun slung carelessly over his shoulder, and "whistling to keep his courage up," when, just as he was mounting a little knoll in the midst of an open moor, he suddenly was aware of a hart standing within a hundred yards, and staring him full in the face. Instinctively he put his gun to

his shoulder, but as quickly withdrew it, on recollecting that it was only loaded with slugs, which he knew would be of little avail against such large game. Small, however, as was the chance of success, there was nothing else for it; so, without more waste of time, he took aim and fired, but apparently without any effect. At this instant, to his further amazement and annoyance, his gun being now unloaded, two deer, before unseen, uprose from the heather, alarmed by the report, and joining their companion bounded away across the moor at a rapid pace. One of them was a magnificent stag; and, from his huge proportions, Rob at once recognized the famous stag of Ben Rhynie. All this took place in a much shorter time than my description has occupied; and Bob had no leisure for reflection. It was now, however, evident that they were making for their inaccessible retreats in the mountain, and unless something was done, and that without delay, the opportunity was lost. Rob was not the man to let slip an occasion, if it could be used in any way; and of the present he determined to make the best, for the circumstances. Of bullets, which were almost indispensable, he had none, save at home; and to fetch them was out of the question. Slugs were of no use, unless he could get very near the game. But as there was no remedy for it, he was fain to make a trial. Accordingly he set off by a circuitous route, through paths best known to himself, hoping that the deer might slacken their pace, and he might yet intercept them before they were lost in the mountain.

After a forced march of some three miles, he gained a spot whence, with the wind in his favour, he could command a view of them as they approached, if they had not already passed; and as he could detect no fresh tracts, he concluded that he was beforehand with them. Here therefore he took his stand, and, located behind a large grey rock, waited anxiously for their approach.

Presently they were in view, the big stag leading the way, and gradually came nearer, all unsuspicious of the hidden danger; at length the much-coveted prize was within range. With a bullet the practised eye of the poacher could have made sure of him; but with the means he had at hand Rob doubted his powers.

Still, however, Hope, "heaven-born maid," whispered encouragement; and now the animal was within fifty yards, he began to

snuff the air suspiciously, and no time was to be lost. A keen eye glanced down the barrel cautiously projected over the edge of the rock, a steady finger pulled the trigger, a sharp report awoke the echoes of the rocks around, and the stag fell; while the remaining two took to flight and scoured across the moor. Having no second barrel in reserve, there was nothing for it but to rush in, and if possible terminate the matter with the knife. Scarcely, however, had he approached within ten paces of the prostrate deer, when it suddenly sprang to its feet, charged Rob, and overthrew though without seriously hurting him, and then made off at a surprising rate for the hill. Ruefully rose the poacher from the ground, shook himself, and gazed disconsolately after the receding beauty. He saw distinctly that the animal's movements were made with difficulty, and that he must soon come to a stop. Once more therefore he loaded with slugs, and followed, as fast as his shaken limbs, the rough nature of the ground, and the waning light of day would allow. But he gradually lost all sight and trace of the deer; and as it grew dark he was compelled reluctantly to give up the search. On the morrow he felt sure he should find the stag stiff and feeble, and then a bullet brought from his stock at home would speedily decide the event. But then came the unpleasant recollection that the morrow was the Sabbath; and Rob, like many more of his countrymen, had his scruples, almost amounting to superstition, regarding the observance of this day. On six days in the week he could, and constantly did, shoot his deer, or other game, in spite of law; but that same law he could not prevail on himself to break by the open desecration of the Sabbath. Though he would drink whisky to any extent withindoors, he would not violate the law without.

The morrow came. The whole morning passed, and Rob had not crossed his threshold, though his whole thoughts were engrossed by the unsatisfactory events of yesterday.

Towards afternoon, however, he reasoned with himself that there could be no serious wrong in taking a quiet walk among the hills without his gun. Possibly he might see the stag and mark him for the next day, when poaching would again, in his estimation, become legitimate.

This was no sooner thought of than put into execution. Arming

himself with a stout stick and his knife, Rob set out on his Sabbath day's journey. Directing his steps towards the fastnesses which the stag was especially supposed to frequent, he mounted the ridge at its lowest end, and, as he slowly ascended to the higher regions of the mountain, he carefully surveyed the hollows lying below. For some time he employed himself in this way, and his sight had begun to ache from the operation, when his attention was arrested by a dark-brown object, very closely resembling a deer, lying in the heather at some distance. He looked again. Surely it must be so; or was his aching sight deceiving him? Again he looked, and now he no longer had a doubt.

All scruples were in a moment cast to the wind, and, having noted the ground, he determined to make the best approach, and began his descent of the mountain-side by the course of a burn which wound its way through the glen below, and passed within a few yards of the reposing deer, the position of which, as well as its apparent size, almost convinced him that it must be the special object of his search. Matters were so far in his favour; and now he almost regretted his scruples as to bringing his gun. Armed as he was, he could do little against the antlered monarch of the forest; but, at all events, he was resolved to get as near as possible, and make out whether it really were the wounded animal or not. On he went along the burn, ever keeping out of sight and in a stooping posture, and moving more slowly and cautiously as he gained the vicinity of the game, lest he should create an alarm even by turning a stone noisily. He had crept, according to his own calculations, to within a hundred yards of the spot, when he ventured to look cautiously over the bank, but nothing could he see. He advanced a few yards further, and then, on again peering through the heather, what a sight greeted his eyes! There before him lay the big stag, to all appearance lifeless; but, as it might be only asleep, he still moved silently. Again therefore creeping on, under shelter of the bank, he once more looked up, and found himself within twenty yards of the deer, still lying motionless and undisturbed. He watched for some moments, transfixed to the spot. He could not approach nearer under cover, as the burn now took a turn and receded; but still he was in doubts whether to step up to the animal at once, or to leave him till the morrow, when he might

return with his gun. While, however, he was halting between two opinions, the stag slowly raised his head, drove some tiresome flies from his flank with his horn, and then lay down again at full length on the heather. Rob saw at a glance, by the listless movement of the stag, that he was ailing in health, and, drawing his hunting-knife from his pocket, he crept up the bank, suddenly sprang to his legs, and, rushing in upon the animal, before it had time to comprehend what was going on, seized hold of one hind leg, and hamstrung it. The stag now wheeled quickly round on its remaining leg, as on a pivot, and threw Rob to the ground with some force; but, prepared for such an attack, he speedily rolled aside, and escaped unhurt. For a long while they stood eyeing each other, the deer angrily shaking his head and uttering an occasional snort or a moan of pain, and Rob watching for an opportunity to close with his antagonist. Night overtook the two parties still in this position. But, though the glassy eye of the deer and his look of anguish and exhaustion moved the poacher's commiseration, and increased his wish to terminate the scene, yet his recollection of yesterday's defeat, and the testimony his own bones bore to the rough treatment he had then received, prevented him from exposing himself to a repetition of the penalty paid for approaching too near the wounded animal. At length therefore, as darkness closed in upon him, he was compelled to postpone further operations to the morning, sure of then finding the deer, disabled as he was, near the same spot.

As the third day dawned Rob set out, his gun carefully cleaned and loaded with ball. He soon reached the place where he had left the deer on the previous night; and though he could not perceive the animal itself, he soon detected traces of it. These he carefully followed, until they led to a burn; but here, though he followed the banks for some distance both up and down the stream, not a vestige could he discover. The stag must have continued its course over some hard stones, thus leaving no clue to its movements. Rob was completely puzzled; the only chance seemed to be in roaming about the ground, and examining carefully in every direction. But, conscious of the unlawfulness of his proceedings, he could not do this in open daylight with the cool attention he wished. His conscience troubled him. Having escaped detection two days, he thought the chances were against equal good fortune

on the third. Fancy made him start again and again, at the imaginary voices and appearance of foresters. Each tuft of heather that fluttered in the wind seemed a forester's bonnet; each waving fern a forester's plaid. And so the day wore on; evening approached, and Rob began to despair. He now sat down on a knoll, rising from the bank of a burn that fretted and chafed its winding way to the loch below, and here he racked his brain to think what could have become of the prize so nearly won, so strangely lost.

Occupied with these reflections, he was somewhat startled on detecting a something moving in the burn about two hundred yards below him. The oft-reviving image of the forester at once recurred to his mind. Can he be watched? Has he been the object of observation the whole morning through? No, "it is the stag, 'mile diabholan!' 't is the stag," slaking his feverish thirst, and easing his burning tongue in the cool waters of the burn. An exclamation of delight burst from his lips, and in a moment Rob is flat on the heather, and sliding down the side of the knoll. Cautiously approaching, he gradually shortens the distance between them, and succeeds in creeping close up to the animal unobserved. And now, anxious, if possible, to avoid the noise of a shot, he watches his opportunity; and at length, leaping into the burn in the rear of the beast, before it can turn round upon him, almost helpless as it is from loss of blood and the disabled limb behind, as well as harassed and impeded by the loose stones in the burn, and agitated by the suddenness of the attack, he springs upon its back, and, plunging his knife deep into its breast, thus terminates the existence of the famed stag of Ben Rhynie.

Such, my dear Jack, was one out of many "olden memories" of the grey-haired poacher. Other stories were related in the course of our somewhat lengthy morning call; but I must postpone them till I have more leisure, lest I glut your interest by too abundant a supply at first. Sufficient, I trust, is the one I have given, to awaken you to a conviction of what you have lost by clinging tenaciously to the money-making matter-of-fact South, and of your now grovelling notions in scorning the Highlands—the only place in Great Britain where there yet lingers a savour of primitive simplicity or the chance of actual adventure.

The salmon-season is fast drawing to a close. I hope we shall be able to make the most of the few days that remain, and that my next may report successful sport.



LETTER VI.

After the events recorded in my last, I determined, as the season for salmon-fishing was now drawing fast to a close, to devote the few remaining days of it to the rivers, leaving the deer and the forest, for a time at least, unmolested.

This determination was further confirmed by the very opportune arrival of the Laird's eldest son Alister, an enthusiastic lover of sport of all kinds, for a visit of a few days. Having obtained permission from a neighbouring proprietor for himself and a friend to fish for a couple of days in an excellent river, the Scaurdale, distant about forty miles, he kindly invited me to accompany him; and, as the accounts he brought of the prospect of sport were sufficiently promising, you may well imagine I was by no means loth to accept the invite. Though our own neighbourhood had for some time enjoyed a full share of rain, the river we were about to visit, he informed me, had not been so favoured, having for several weeks been very low. The rains, however, of the last few days having produced a considerable "speyet," the salmon, which for want of water had long been collecting and lingering about the mouth, were at length able to make their way up the stream, and were now doing so in great numbers.

Alister being an experienced hand, the needful preparations were left to his discretion; and the first beam of the morning saw us seated in a trap behind a stout Highland pony, and starting for the scene of sport *in prospectu*. It was a lovely morning, somewhat chill, but with a sky cloudless, save where a small speck here and there dotted the welkin, and from its rich roseate fringe foretold the coming of the yet invisible "lamp of day." Such mornings however are frequently, indeed generally, succeeded by a rainy day; and we began to fear dirty weather, and an increased "speyet." The rivers were already sufficiently high; and, as an additional

flood would not improve the fishing, the prospect was not cheering; but we hoped for the best.

Of our route, pretty as it was, and characteristic of the Highlands, I will endeavour to give you the best description I can.

For the first half-dozen miles there was nothing very striking; but we then began to wind our way through a birchen forest, the trees lining the road on either side, almost meeting over our heads, completely shutting us in, and imparting an air of seclusion, which, with the deathlike silence that reigned around, unbroken save by the clinking of the pony and the rumble of the wheels, seemed to communicate itself to our feelings and to cast a spell on our tongues. Occasionally, as we got a glimpse along some glade in the forest, we saw the black-cock stealing off to the shelter of the ferns, or the roe in security straining his pretty neck to reach the tenderest shoots on the birchen bough. Altogether, it was such a morning as I never saw before, and in all likelihood never shall see again; indeed a second such would not produce a similar effect. There was something so new to me, a Southron, in the combination of perfect peace, and calm, the thorough security of the frequenters of the wood, the wildness of the district around, and yet the Devonshire-like character of the lane we were following, that I felt quite spell-bound. My companion, too, though no stranger to the scene, was not thoroughly proof against its influence; and for some distance we drove on in silence, till a sudden turn brought us unexpectedly on a small herd of roe quietly grazing in the road. Though not more than a hundred yards away, they exhibited no signs of alarm, but merely springing gracefully to the top of the bank, one by one took a steady survey of us as we approached, and then disappeared within the covert.

Shortly after this the nature of the scenery changed. Our road lay along the banks of an inland frith or arm of the sea, running up the country some twenty miles. In some parts the shore rose quickly to an elevation of fifteen hundred feet, in others receding into open moors stretching far away to our left. Where the rise was abrupt the road was blasted, and cut in the solid rock, at a height of about one hundred and fifty feet above the water. The rocks were covered with the mountain-ash, dwarf oaks, and stunted birch, whose roots found a scanty hold and meagre subsistence among

their fissures and interstices; while about them were congregated, like so many satellites, tufts of various kinds of ferns and lichens; the ivy and the stagshorn moss hanging down in graceful festoons, or the foxglove ringing its many bells, glistening with the morning dew. Here and there a giant pine reared his tall head high above all the rest, the wood-pigeon still roosting or cooing among the clusters of fir-apples. Many a tiny burn tinkled its way from stone to stone, and, creeping quietly across our course, fell over the precipice and was lost on the beach below. Occasionally a larger stream, swollen into a torrent, dashed from rock to rock down towards the road, and then, when within a yard of our wheels, suddenly disappeared through a stone-built tunnel beneath us; while up its course might be seen a few solitary wild roses still lingering in the shade, as though loath to withdraw their charms from these lovely "neuks;" and sometimes above all a slight rainbow hung suspended in the steaming spray.

When we came to the open moor, we saw the cock grouse stationed here and there, like a solitary sentinel, on some hillock, watching our approach with jealous eye; while now and then we detected a brood of young birds crouching beneath some whin-bush. Presently, we caught sight of a small bird skimming across the muir in pursuit of a larger one, which, as they winged their way nearer to us, proved to be a merlin and a grouse. In vain the latter strained himself to the utmost, and endeavoured to elude his ruthless pursuer. They both crossed the road a few yards in advance of us; and almost immediately afterwards the merlin struck his prey to the ground. The courage of this small species of hawk is very great. I am told that they not unfrequently hover about the sportsman while he is shooting on the moor; and a single merlin has been known to strike down a wounded grouse considerably larger than himself, within range of gun, and without compunction or delay quietly commence tearing up the prey.

As we drove along, the lapwing was wheeling round in the air, and broke the stillness of the solitude by her mournful note; occasionally joined by the whistle of the curlew, as he hurried to his feeding-ground on some lone marsh. Presently our road brought us once more to the shore of the frith, which stretched, smooth as glass, far as the eye could distinguish in one direction, being there

belted by a thin streak of white, the breakers of the ocean; while in the opposite direction it wound along for some miles, gradually narrowing until it became lost among the hills in the blue distance.

Here and there might be seen a solitary heron dreaming on one leg, while others were picking their way over the shingle, or standing motionless, knee-deep in water, as they watched for the fish that swam heedlessly by, and in a moment were transported from their proper element to the bowels of their greedy devourers.

Further out, the great northern diver, or other smaller water-fowl, were dimpling the surface of the frith, as they washed their plumage and disported beneath the morning sun; while now and then a heavy splash marked the course of the salmon, who hugged the shore on his way to the higher waters of some river. I looked in vain for any signs of a seal. Though not at all uncommon in this arm of the sea,—indeed, much more numerous than the fishermen would have them,—not a head of them was visible this morning. But more than half-way across the water, two or three porpoises were ploughing the deep, and following doubtless the course of some shoal of herrings, in their peculiar rolling fashion.

I had an anecdote related to me lately by a Highland gentleman, which illustrates the sagacity and skill of these fish in the pursuit of their prey. He was standing on a small rocky promontory jutting out into a salt-water loch, in front of the hotel at which he was staying. His attention was attracted by some objects in the distance, which, as they came nearer, proved to be five porpoises. They were making straight for the part of the cliff where he was stationed; and as it was a most beautiful day, and the water perfectly clear, as well as deep up to the very cliff itself, he determined to watch their movements. On came the porpoises, all five abreast; and as they approached, he distinctly saw a whole shoal of herrings, their silvery coats twinkling in the sunshine, as they dashed through the water before their pursuers. The porpoises played their parts with as much skill as so many trained shepherd-dogs driving a flock to the fold. As they neared, they formed into a crescent, so as to shut in as much as possible the tiny crowd before them; and at length, when arrived immediately beneath the position of my informant,—the herrings being crowded thickly together by the cliff in front, and the circling enemy behind,—the porpoises simultane-

ously plunged into the jostling terrified mass; and the gentleman assured me, he could literally see numbers of them engulphed by the open jaws of the porpoises,—a bourn from which, doubtless, none would ever return.

After a drive of some twenty-five miles we reached a small way-side inn, where we put up our pony for a bait of two or three hours; and, having discussed a Scotch breakfast, consisting of fish cooked in three or four different forms, oatcakes, bannocks, and marmalade, preceded by a "nip" of bitters as a provocative of the appetite (very unnecessary, by-the-by, on the present occasion, when the morning air and the long drive had generated a sufficient degree of voracity), we unpacked our fishing-tackle, and, there being a small river near at hand, belonging to the same proprietor as the water we were invited to fish, and which after a speyet not unfrequently afforded very fair sport, we proceeded to spend the remaining two hours of our bait in trying its merits. The Chruim is but a small stream, save when swollen by rain, the effects of which, however, seldom last beyond a few hours. At this time we found it of very fair dimensions, and the salmon were evidently making the most of the short opportunity, for we saw them constantly springing out of the water on their upward course.

After following the course of the stream about a quarter of a mile, we came to the only pool on the river,—Poul Glas, or the Grey Pool, so called from the colour of the rocks around it. Here the salmon congregate before ascending the fall just above; and here we commenced operations. I took the part of the pool nearest to the fall, being separated from it by a rapid, which plunged through some huge fragments of rock almost meeting overhead, and reminding one of the "blue Symplegades," famed in ancient story for closing on the ill-fated vessels that passed between their rocky jaws. On one of these fragments I took my stand, and, casting my fly on the dark water boiling just below, I soon raised a fish, but did not succeed in hooking him. After a slight delay I cast again and again; but, after repeated trials and no success, as there was no other likely spot except that occupied by my companion, I went up to the fall and watched the waters tumbling down from ledge to ledge, from stone to stone. While standing by I observed more than one salmon attempt to scale the height, but without success.

After a few minutes spent in this way I descended, and, having again tried my part of the pool, and caught nothing, though I raised more than one good fish, I threw down my rod and turned to watch Alister, who was fishing within a few yards of me, at the lower end of the pool. He had hooked a good fish while I was up at the falls, and was just about to land it as I joined him. A grizzly old keeper or "water-bailie," who had accompanied us, was rendering assistance with his gaff, and speedily laid the fish gasping on the shingle. Alister now cast his fly at the head of a runnel just as it left the pool, bidding me watch the event, as he had marked a good fish rise a moment before in that spot. The third cast proved successful; and in ten minutes there were a couple of fine fish lying on the shingle, and a third hooked in the same spot, fighting desperately for his life. Alister offered his rod to me, which of course I took with pleasure, and after a careful and patient struggle I landed my fish. I then took a cast with Alister's rod, a few yards into the pool, and the "butcher fly," which had already proved itself worthy of its name, still maintained its character, by quickly hooking a fourth fish, which succumbed after a ten minutes' struggle.

We had now taken our full complement from the Poul Glas,—four salmon landed on the same spot,—and it was scarcely likely that any more would be taken, after the disturbance we had already made. I therefore now returned Alister his rod, and, leaving him to whip the pool a little longer, I took my way down the stream towards the inn, casting my fly occasionally as I passed a promising runnel. Twice or thrice a salmon rose, but only timidly in the shallow water, and I did not succeed in hooking any. Before leaving the stream, however, I had secured three sea-trout, one of which afforded excellent sport, fighting most valiantly, and defying my utmost efforts for full ten minutes.

Arrived at the inn, I was presently joined by Alister, with five fish, another having been caught after my departure, making in all five salmon; which, with the addition of my three sea-trout, formed a goodly company, at least as the production of one pool. The salmon weighed between seven and nine pounds each, and the trout two pounds, three pounds and a half, and four pounds respectively.

Our booty was now stowed carefully away in the bottom of the dogcart, wrapped in moist rushes; and our Highland pony being

re-yoked, who started off as gaily as though only now leaving the stable for the first time, we speedily left Glen Chruim in the rear.

Our route still continued along the shore of the frith, which was now rapidly narrowing and assuming more and more the character of a river, as it wound round the bases of the hills and uplands that rose from its tortuous bed.

We passed several fishermen mending their nets, the season for netting salmon being now passed; their boats were lying at intervals of from fifty to two hundred yards along the bank. It is, indeed, a marvel how the salmon in their ascent succeed in escaping enemies so numerous and indefatigable. Not only have they to elude the seal and the otter, the latter of which proves a constant foe, up to the very highest parts of the river; but the nets of the fishermen, dovetailing together as they do from the opposite banks, and employed as they are almost unremittingly, take the fish in very great numbers. At one place through which we passed, where there was a small collection of fishermen's huts, we were told that three hundred had lately been taken in one day. And yet, in spite of these disadvantages, there are three rivers at the head of this frith, and dependent on its waters for their supply of fish, which nevertheless afford sport almost equal to the best in Scotland.

As we approached the head of the frith, the clouds, which had been gathering for some time, began to shed a scanty rain. This, however, did not last long; a breeze springing up dispersed the dampness, and everything looked promising and bright. The scenery now grew less varied, being chiefly moorland, gently undulating; though in the distance on either hand there were lofty and bold hills bounding the horizon. A three hours' drive brought us to Scaurdale Bridge, whence we had a view of the quarters we were to occupy,—a secluded inn, lately rebuilt in a pretty style, being a one-storied house, forming three sides of a square. We paused on the bridge to look at the river rushing beneath us, the merits of which we proposed soon to test. There were some picturesque little Highland bairns playing happily on its bank, a tame roe-fawn joining fearlessly in their sport, and gambolling gracefully around, as they stood to inspect the strangers. At two o'clock we drew up in "the square," before the hotel door; saw our pony properly cared for, having brought corn along with us (a precaution, by-the-by,

always to be commended, as it is frequently in these parts an utter impossibility to procure such a commodity, people preferring to convert their oats into meal and cakes for themselves, rather than keep it "on spec" for an occasional horse); and having committed one of our sea-trout to the tender care of the landlady, with the injunction that she should cook it for us at once, we employed the interval in preparing our tackle for the coming campaign, looking over our fly-books, and discussing the merits of the sundry gaudy-looking formations therein. The culinary department was not of the highest order, and we found the need of a good appetite to make our meal palatable.

By five o'clock we were down by the bridge, each with an attendant. The extent of water to be fished was not much more than a quarter of a mile, but all of it good, and almost evenly divided by the bridge on which we stood. Alister, therefore, took the upper part, while the lower fell to my share.

The river was rather too much flooded and the water too dark for good sport; and though it was a most beautiful stream, and the salmon were leaping in all directions, they were not disposed to take the fly. Occasionally a huge tail flapped on the water, and reminded one of the existence of the fly, but numbers passed unheedingly by.

Towards evening, however, as the sun went down, matters began to improve. I had changed my fly, by the advice of my attendant, Murdoch; and, stationed on a rock jutting far into the stream, I threw to the opposite bank, and then drew my fly gradually across a likely-looking eddy just below a rapid, to which he had directed my attention. The very first time it danced across the water, I saw six or seven fish rush at it; but, in their eagerness hindering each other, they all failed to secure the little attractive insect above them. I repeated the attempt, and again there was the same general rush, but not the same result. A fish was hooked; but how long he would continue so was a matter of great uncertainty, should his present wild proceedings continue. For ten minutes he fought desperately, rushing fiercely backwards and forwards across the stream, in a manner that bade fair each moment to break my line across some of the many big stones that studded the river's bed. This first burst of the storm, however, once weathered, I perceived a sen-

sible change in his behaviour; each struggle became less prolonged, and my line was gradually coming home to me.

But the difficulty was how to bring him within range of old Murdoch's landing-net. I was still standing on the stone from which I had hooked the fish, and, as it required no little agility to reach it, his aged limbs were unable to follow me, and the boiling waters precluded the possibility of wading. My only plan, therefore, was to return to the bank; but this was not easily done. To retrace a step once taken is often difficult, and in the present instance I should have to perform a succession of leaps from one slippery stony point to another, with a strong salmon pulling at me the while, and the certainty that if I slackened my line a moment, or made one false step, he would escape me. In this dilemma, however, Murdoch's experience and ingenuity came to my relief. He pointed out to me a stone, which I could gain without any very great difficulty, and where he could throw me the handle of the landing-net, with which I might feel my way, and balance myself steadily until I regained *terra firma*.

This plan, carried out coolly and deliberately, as my only chance, answered thoroughly; and I presently found myself by Murdoch's side, safe myself, and the salmon still feebly struggling on the hook.

The danger now over, I drew him gradually to the bank, and Murdoch lifted him lovingly out of the water, when, to our astonishment, we found that he was only hooked externally, the fly having caught in his gill in the general rush. So terminated my sport for today; for, on looking up, I saw Alister on the bridge waiting for me. As it was growing dusk, and the river not yet in first-rate order, he thought we had better postpone operations till the morrow, when, if no more rain fell, the water would be clearer and the fish in a more taking mood. So we gave up, and started for the inn. Alister had himself caught a couple of good fish,—one nearly ten pounds in weight, the other about two pounds less. Our creel thus far, therefore, was eleven fish,—eight salmon and three sea-trout.

After again attacking the cold salmon and vinegar, oat-cake and a most disagreeably-flavoured cheese, forming the second and last course, I enjoyed a most delightful ramble by moonlight, and we then sought our pillows. So unprepossessing, however, was the

whole appearance of our pallets, and so overstocked were they with a very active as well as biting kind of little creature, that I preferred rolling myself up in my rug and plaid, and sleeping on the outside,—an example which my companion was glad to follow after an hour's experience of the inside. But so much had the sleeping hours of the previous night been curtailed by our early drive, that, once stretched there, we found no difficulty in getting to sleep; and the sun was high in the heavens next morning before we were aroused by a jesting message from the impatient gillies, Murdoch and Hector, that the salmon would be all up the falls and caught in the traps above, unless we were at them speedily.

The breakfast—not being much more tempting than the beds—was quickyl discussed, and we then sallied forth. This time we both commenced fishing at the falls, within a few yards of each other, but on opposite sides of the river, and working down-stream. The fish were as thick as possible, and quite jostled each other as they rushed in crowds at the fly; and scarcely a moment passed without one or two, sometimes four or five, being visible, as they dashed up the runnels in sport, or sprang lustily into the air.

I rose numbers, and pricked several, before I succeeded in hooking one. But eventually I did hook one, in a very narrow part of the river, where it was rushing fiercely through a huge cleft in the rocks. At first he took down the stream at a fearful pace, and I thought he was fairly off to the sea, and that my line must go with him; but my gilly contrived to head him, and by throwing stones as he reached some calmer water, drove him up the stream again. This, however, was no improvement. One of the most critical stages of a salmon's struggles is when he turns back and rushes towards the fisherman. It is next to impossible to wind up the line fast enough if the fish is darting as rapidly as he generally does; and the danger then is that the tackle, catching on some stone or other obstacle, may be suddenly snapped, or that, if it becomes slack, the fish may, as he can in a moment, suck it out of his flesh and escape. On the present occasion I wound up my line as fast as I possibly could, but it would not do; and I was obliged to run backwards to keep my line taut, at the risk of tumbling over the stones and breaking my rod, line, and shins together. However, as the fish fortunately did not escape, this rush up the stream told considerably upon him, and

gave me a material advantage, for he now had not only me but the force of the current to contend with,—a coalition which soon proved too much for him. He weighed, according to Murdoch's calculation, about seven pounds; and there were several sea-lice still upon him, thus proving that he was just fresh from the sea. I caught, in the course of the next three hours, four more salmon of about the same weight, and most of them still carrying sea-lice; one was wounded in the shoulder, having evidently had a narrow escape with his life from some seal. I was now joined by Alister, in a bad humour for having, like myself, missed so many fish; however, he had no great cause of complaint, being accompanied by Hector bearing six very nice salmon, none weighing less than seven pounds. And now, having so many miles between us and our head-quarters, we packed up our traps, and, the little Highlander once more yoked to the dogcart, we started for home, highly delighted with our success. In about seven hours, putting the separate times together, we had taken in all twenty-two fish,—nineteen salmon and three sea-trout. I doubt if I shall ever enjoy better sport, or be more gratified altogether. Had we been able to fish the whole of the two days, we should in all probability have taken not far short of a score each; but we had done sufficiently well to satisfy the most fastidious and ardent votary of the angle; and, as this will in all likelihood be the last day worth recording of my this year's salmon fishing, we had brought it, as I think you will admit, to a satisfactory and triumphant conclusion.



LETTER VII.



On Wednesday, we, *i. e.* one of the Laird's sons and myself, went to the Redburn for the last time this season. Passing by the pools which we had fished on former occasions, as being at present too placid and sleepy, we followed the river's course, up to some higher places, which I had not yet visited, but which in Donald's opinion were more likely to have fish than the lower parts, since the late flood.

For some distance the river, having been diverted from its original winding course, passed through a straight cut of recent construction; and here there was no angling to be had, the stream being too uniform and shallow; but in due time we arrived at the upper pools and commenced operations.

The salmon were leaping about in a most tantalizing fashion;—great fellows springing out of the water, sometimes two or three feet into the air, and coming down with a splash like that of a man. Now and then they swam up to the fly, and passed it without taking the least notice, or, with a lazy flap of the tail, turned round and darted back into the black depths below. The sight alone for some time kept up the interest, and I fished on, though without success. At length, however, having tried the sailor's plan, of whistling to coax a wind, again and again, but to no purpose, and despairing of sport, I gave it up as a bad job. I had, indeed, succeeded in hooking one fish, a small one of four or five pounds' weight, who got himself caught by mistake; but after teazing me for a couple of minutes, he had quietly slipt off, and I saw no more of him.

My companion, as I found on joining him, had secured one fish, which he had cleverly hooked, by dropping the fly cleverly under his gills, and then, by a sudden jerk, fixing it in his jaws. It

proved a pretty good one, weighing about seven pounds. We now, as a last resource, struck across the moor, for a mountain loch, famous for a large kind of trout, commonly called the "bull-trout;" some, it was said, having been taken there up to ten pounds in weight.

On our way thither, as we were leaping from stone to stone, up the rugged course of a mountain burn, which had lately been considerably swollen by the rain, though it was now almost dry, we came upon a sea-trout of about four pounds weight, lying on the shingle dead, but quite fresh. As there were no marks of violence about him, he had not been conveyed thither by an otter, or any other enemy, but had evidently become the victim of his own rashness; his natural instinct having led him to follow the course of the burn too far. He had ascended at least three hundred feet above the level of the river we had just left; but though the ascent had been easy, as well as natural, at the time he made it, on the burn's subsequently sinking to its ordinary dimensions, he had been left there a monument of the folly and danger, even in the brute creation, of aspiring too high, and of the truth of the doctrine that the most elevated stations are not necessarily the most happy or secure.

> "Often to our comfort shall we find
> The sharded beetle in a safer hole,
> Than is the full-winged eagle."

'T is the highest trees are shaken most; the highest hills are most exposed to the levin-flash. And had that trout but observed the "*modus in rebus*," and stayed quietly in his river, he might have lived to propagate a numerous and respectable progeny, or at the least have served the laudable end of gratifying the angler.

And here, my friend, while on this subject, I may conveniently reply to a question, contained in one of your late epistles, anent the capacity of salmon for overcoming the difficulties which they must frequently meet with on their way to the spawning-bed. You seem rather to insinuate doubts as to the accuracy of my calculations, regarding the height of sundry waterfalls which I have mentioned, and suggest that I may possibly have made my observations *through the misty medium of mountain dew*, which is apt to represent objects in undue proportions. Now I am ready to

admit that it is quite possible I may have somewhat overstated the height of different falls, for nothing is more easy than to be deceived in such a matter; and a rough guess, made from recollection, never can ensure perfect accuracy; nevertheless these fish do possess a marvellous power of overcoming such difficulties. Though a salmon cannot leap sheer out of the water more than six, or perhaps eight feet, this has nothing to do with the height of a fall he may surmount. In the latter case he is still in his own element; he, as it were, *runs up* the water, generally in a direction slanting across the fall, and it would be difficult to say exactly how high he could ascend in this manner.

Nets and wicker baskets are frequently put at the head of falls twenty feet high, to catch the fish as they ascend. There is a river, the name of which however I do not recollect, where the fish are caught by holes made in the rocks at the falls, in which the fish drop, having overshot the mark in their ascent. And there is a tradition connected with the falls of Kilmhorach, to the effect that a salmon was once boiled alive there; the fish having rushed up the fall, and thrown itself by mistake into a caldron of boiling water placed purposely on the ledge above.

Traps of the above description are, I believe, common enough throughout the Highlands; and at some hotels tourists are constantly regaled on fish caught in this way. Of course if a salmon can rush up a fall twenty feet in sheer perpendicular height, he can surmount a cascade, or series of falls, considerably higher, where the inequalities of the surface would aid him materially in the ascent.

But to return. After a walk of about a mile we arrived at the loch. Embosomed in the hills, it lay before us unruffled by the gentlest breath of wind. A high cliff, rising abruptly from one bank, cast its shadow nearly across the loch, whose waters seemed almost inky-black from their great depth, though its whole extent was not more than a quarter of a mile square. At one end there were a few weeds, and less depth of water. Thither therefore we bent our steps, hoping to find some of the smaller fish feeding; as there seemed no probability, in the present calm, of the larger bull-trout being drawn from their haunts below. Three wild-duck rose from the shelter of the weeds, as we were putting on our flies, and

with a quack of alarm, winged their way to the highest reaches of the Redburn. After wading some way into the waters, so as to cast beyond the weeds, we caught five or six trout, none of them more than half a pound in weight; and then walking round the shore, we tried the deeper water, but still as before the calm was against us, and though our flies were continually changed, we caught nothing more. Once indeed I raised a good fish with a large black fly, but as he had unfortunately felt the hook, nothing could induce him to make a second essay. In the best weather angling for these larger fish is very uncertain work, as they are of course fewer in number than the small fry, and also more dainty, and their haunts more difficult of access. This difficulty of course is enhanced if the angler is compelled, from want of a boat, to content himself with casting from the shore.

Finding therefore that we were not likely to make much of it to-day, we put up our tackle and started for home; Donald leading us by a route which we had not yet traversed, in order to show us a curious waterfall on the hill-side. A mountain torrent shooting over a precipice, spreading like a sheet down its glassy surface, and again contracting to a narrow neck at the bottom, dashes into a deep black chasm in the moor, and disappears underground, emerging again into light at a distance of about three hundred yards.

As we stood looking up towards the fall itself, we could distinctly hear the rush of the waters, as they dashed along their unseen channel, beneath the rocky spot on which we were standing, though they must have been several feet below us. Before reaching home we passed by the base of a very high and wild-looking craig, which rose perpendicularly to the height of several hundred feet; its face seamed with huge cracks, and studded here and there with the hardy mountain ash, or occasionally a wild holly. In a nitch near the summit of a kind of projecting buttress was the nest of a raven. At one time the eyrie of a pair of eagles, it had been abandoned by its former kingly inhabitants on the approach of civilization, and for many years had been tenanted by the less noble raven. Though apparently inaccessible to humanity, Donald told me that he had once climbed his way to it,—an experiment however which he did not seem disposed to repeat.

From their mischievous and destructive habits, the birds had be-

come obnoxious, and Donald had recently exterminated the whole family, parents and brood, by firing at them from below. We could distinguish where the rock had been shivered by his bullets, and his quick eye detected the feathers of the fast rotting mass, consisting of parents and young piled together on the rock. We presently reached the banks of the Redburn, which we had to cross on our way home. But being still somewhat swollen, the water did not look at all tempting, and we paused on the brink, doubtful whether to venture into the current or not. While however we were demurring, Donald came to our relief, by promising that if we would follow his guidance we should pass over dryfoot,—a proposal which we were only too glad to accept. Accordingly, preceded by him, we took a short cut across the muir, leaving the stream for awhile, though only that we might return to it further down. A walk of a few minutes brought us to a creek into which the river discharged itself; and as we stood on an elevated rock overlooking it, our guide pointed out the spot at which he assured us we might cross with safety. Two huge rocky buttresses jutted out on either side the stream, and from our present position seemed to meet within a few inches; but on descending and coming to the spot, we found that they were about six feet apart; and through this narrow passage dashed the whole pent-up force of the river, with a roar of thunder, as it plunged into an oblong basin below, called the "Poit bhruich," or boiling pot.

Across this chasm Donald leaped backwards and forwards more than once to convince me of the practicability of the feat; but when I came to stand on the edge of the rock, the roaring of the waters as they dashed furiously beneath me, wrought up into one mass of creamy foam, made my brain reel rather unpleasantly, and I began to repent that we had not taken the ford in preference to the leap; nor was I much assured when told, for my comfort, that no living creature had ever been known to survive an immersion in the waters of the Poit bhruich, which could not be less than forty feet deep.

While I stood silently watching the stream, as it plunged wildly along, until fairly lost in the brine of the ocean, Donald seemed to derive a malicious amusement from telling me that not only had sundry sheep there found a watery grave, but that more than one

unlucky human being had, by a single false step, been hurled into the foaming "pot," there to boil and roll through its inmost caverns to the end of time. With such consoling thoughts, wherefrom to gather encouragement, I determined to put the best face on the matter, and, whatever might be my real sensations, to afford my companions no excuse for cavilling at the courage of an Englishman. "*Fortes fortuna adjuvat.*" Grasping therefore my rod firmly in my hand, without further delay, I sprang over the chasm, which in reality, when viewed apart from all the other enhancing considerations, was an obstacle of but trifling moment. I am told that at the high tides, when the sea almost reaches this narrow throat, the salmon may be seen in numbers, passing by one leap from the salt to the fresh water, though they will not often take the fly so near the sea. On the present occasion, my tackle being packed, I did not make the attempt, but my companion cast carelessly three or four times into the "Pot," while I proceeded on our homeward route. Scarcely however had I advanced ten yards, when I was arrested by a shout, and on looking round, saw his rod almost bent double by some huge fish, which at once plunged into the lowest depths of the pool, and quickly ran out several yards of line. For a moment there was a sudden pause, and we all stood in intense anxiety and suspense, for the fish was evidently a monster; when a sudden dash once more renewed the strain on rod and line; and in another moment, strong and well-tried as it was, the latter snapped, and all was over. The fish had doubtless sawn it asunder on the sharp edge of some rock, and had gone away with the fly and some twenty yards of horsehair.

Such was the provoking termination of our intercourse with the "genus Salmo" for this year,—an intercourse from which, beginning though it did at a late period in the season, I had derived great enjoyment and advantage; having been, on the whole, fortunate beyond my greatest expectations, and having, in spite of inexperience and clumsy skill, met with more than average sport. What Horace says of the poet is also, to a certain extent, true of the fisherman,—"*Nascitur, non fit.*" And yet the reverse also is true to a degree. For though he must have an inborn taste for the pursuit, yet it must also be a work of time to acquire the amount of skill requisite to ensure success and enjoyment. If, born and bred

within the sound of Bow bells, he suddenly finds himself transplanted, rod in hand, to the banks of a salmon river in the Highlands, he is not "*ipso facto*" at once converted into a skilful disciple of the gentle craft. Nor will any amount of preparation, in the shape of book-lore, "crammed" for the occasion, enable him to acquit himself creditably, until he has added thereto personal experience and careful application. 'T was no fool, be assured, that wrote the ancient but no less true proverb, *παθήματα μαθήματα*; so certain is it that defeat teaches us wisdom, and successive failures add so many fresh wrinkles. Skill, even ordinary skill, is only acquired at the cost of frequent disappointment; and he who would be successfnl among the salmon, must be content to lose many a fly, if nothing worse. Moreover he might as well be a rod without a line, as an angler without patience. The struggle which has been cautiously carried on for an hour, may be lost by the hastiness of a moment. Every movement of the fish must be studied, and acted upon with discretion. The state of the weather, the wind and the water, must each come under consideration, and receive their due attention. A rash ignoramus might fish the very best stream, and one day never have a rise, while the next day, with rises innumerable, he might never hook a fish. He must be prepared, as well against the prolonged struggle of the sullen, as against the short-lived but not less trying plunges of the desperate fish.

I lately heard the confessions of a shepherd, within whose shieling I had accidentally discovered, carefully concealed beneath the heather thatch, a home-made but serviceable salmon-rod. He owned he had a great fondness for the sport, having been born and grown up in those halcyon days when every poor man was free to feed wife and bairns on the salmon from the stream that bowled by his door; and he still had, he admitted, an occasional harmless cast, which I, for my part, could not grudge him.

The fiercest struggle with a fish he "minded," was one which continued through a whole night. Having in the evening hooked a very large salmon, and his line being but short, he was forced "to bow to the blast," as he expressed himself, in the hopes that he might eventually weary the creature out. At first he had fairly to fling his rod into the water, which the fish, rushing up the stream,

dragged after it. He then by wading recovered his rod, and for a time offered a slight resistance, when on a sudden rush he had again to relinquish his hold. In this way the fight went on, by fits and starts. And at length, after repeatedly wading the river to follow his rod, and renew the resistance, he resolved, seeing that the hook was so securely fixed, to go home, and leave the fish to weary itself, which he accordingly did. Returning next morning, he was at first disappointed in finding no trace of either rod or fish, but presently he discovered the former some hundred yards further up the stream; and on grasping it, found the salmon still attached to it, and considerably humbled by the night of anxiety and restlessness. The stream, being a rapid one, had always kept the rod *alive*, and the fish therefore ill at ease, and a few moments' fighting brought him to terms; "and a bonnier fish I ne'er saw," said Andrew, "and mony a day the gude wife and the wee anes dined on him."

Gillespie the foxhunter, though no fisherman, has several stories of adventures connected with the salmon. On one occasion he killed an otter and a salmon by the same shot, while they were struggling together. The otter was so intent on securing his prey, that he did not observe the approach of the third party, and Gillespie, standing motionless on the bank of the pool, awaited his opportunity; and as the unsuspecting otter drew the fish towards the bank, close beneath the foxhunter, a well-directed shot passed through his brain, and at the same moment entered the shoulder of the salmon, at once terminating the existence of both. On another occasion, while wandering along the seashore, he performed the still more remarkable feat of killing a seal and cod in the same manner. A curious incident was related to me a few days ago by a Highland gentleman. He was sauntering along the seashore with his gun, when he saw an eagle suddenly pounce upon some object in the water, in all probability a salmon. A fierce fight ensued, in which it seemed doubtful on which side would be the victory. The talons of the eagle were so deeply imbedded in the back of the fish, that he could not extricate himself; while the fish, on his part, was not strong enough to drag his assailant under-water. In this state they continued for some time; the tenant of the deep rushing wildly about, and ploughing up the still waters of the bay;

while the monarch of the air, for once fairly matched, was compelled to ride his finny courser, *nolens volens*, occasionally declaring his majesty's reluctance, by a not very dignified flapping of his kingly pinions. Thus engaged, my informant watched the struggle with considerable interest, until the combatants gradually drifted out to sea, and were presently lost to view. How the matter terminated witness deponeth not.

Gillespie once found an eagle and a skate lying dead upon the shore, having doubtless both perished in a similar struggle.

LETTER VIII.

HAVING as yet confined my accounts chiefly to our campaigns among the salmon and the deer, I purpose in this Letter to give you, by way of variety, a few extracts from my diary for last month.

My first shall be a day's duck-shooting; not indeed as being remarkable for any great luck, for the sport was rather under than above the average; but because I am not likely, as I had hoped, to have an opportunity of recurring to that particular branch of shooting, and therefore I wish to give you what has been my own experience in it.

Alister, Walter, and myself were the parties engaged; a gillie and retriever forming a by no means unimportant addition to the party. The scene of operations was a loch or meer, lying in a low marshy locality; being, even at the time we visited it, of considerable extent,—though I am told that it is much larger through the winter and spring,—of no great depth, and abounding in sedge and water-plants of many different kinds. There were two or three small islands, distinguishable from the surrounding mass of weeds by the group of willows crowded together upon each of them, and affording convenient and safe retreats whereon the waterfowl might dry their plumage beneath the sun, or trim their feathers after the performance of their ablutions. Amid the long, dank grass, too, which grew like a tiny prairie over their limited surface, many a coot and mallard built her nest; finding a security there not always to be had among the reeds and sedge, where the rise of the water, consequent on rainy weather, or the fall of it, which succeeded a drought, were alike detrimental to the safety of the eggs. Notwithstanding this risk, however, not a few still placed their frail "lares" among the reeds; and though, no doubt, the fond hopes of many a mother—if waterfowl may be supposed to have hopes—ebbed lower and lower as the waters rose, and rose again as the

waters fell; and though not unfrequently the nest and the hopes were *damped* together, yet broods sufficiently numerous survived the intrigues of the elements to keep the loch and the neighbourhood fairly stocked with waterfowl.

Such was the locality. A few words should also be devoted to the nature of our dress. For myself, I was clad in Crimean waterproof boots, reaching nearly to the thigh; a most serviceable protection against damp to any one who is constantly in the water, and who does not wade beyond a certain depth; but at all times awkward, as when once wetted they become so very heavy as to prevent any quick motion on dry land, and if the wearer once wade deep enough to admit the water at the top of his boots, he will regret that he ever put them on at all. What is proof *against* wet, is also necessarily proof to *retain it* when once admitted, and in such a case a leaky pair of worn-out laced boots is far preferable to the best patent waterproofs ever made. This I soon learnt by unpleasant experience: my two companions, on the other hand, were too well acquainted with the place to which we were going, as well as with the merits of such attire, to follow my example. Their dress on the occasion was of the ordinary kind, and that the oldest and least valuable they possessed.

Arrived on the spot,—an event which was accomplished by the agency of pony and dogcart,—our first step was to try some marshy-looking ground for snipe. We soon put up a small wisp, and Walter and Alister each brought down their bird. A second and third lot rose as we shot, and alighted again at no great distance; but as we were proceeding to follow them, about a score of ducks arose from the loch, alarmed at our firing, and took their departure seawards. Resolving to profit by the hint, we at once abandoned the search for snipe, and took our way to the loch itself, bent on larger game; before however we had reached the bank, several more ducks had risen, and were following in the wake of the first flock. We now gained the margin of the loch, and cautiously approaching the only open piece of water in its whole extent, saw several broods of young ducks, still at that age when they go by the significant name of "flappers," scuttling off, followed by their loquacious mothers, and seeking the shelter of the weeds, which growing to the height of full two feet above the surface of the water, afforded them an excellent cover.

Just as we stepped up to the very edge, two teal, which had previously lain snugly ensconced under the bank, darted forth from their retreat, alarmed by our approach: every step shaking the spongy soil to the distance of three or four feet around us, and thus telegraphing the coming danger. We watched them dive and skim along the bottom, the depth of water not being more than two feet at the most; and then waiting our opportunity, as they rose to take breath, Alister killed his bird, and I winged mine, which after two or three dives, was secured by the dog.

We then took a circuit round to the further side of the loch, where the weeds were tallest and thickest, and commenced wading. And now began the tug of war. On first stepping into the water we found ourselves immersed to the knees, the reeds reaching almost to our breasts; and so stout were they and thickly packed that we found it very difficult to make head against them. What the equestrian would call "lofty action" was indispensable, as well as great endurance. Moreover rest, or pausing to recover wind, was out of the question; for no sooner did I become stationary, than I discovered the treacherous nature of what I had fondly imagined the bottom of the loch. Whether it were really a bottomless pit or not, would be difficult to prove; for the substance upon which I walked was composed of an endless tissue of reeds and dead weeds, the deposit and growth of ages; forming a kind of platform, which supported me while in motion, but the instant that I came to dwell upon any one spot, I became aware that I was gradually sinking through this floating carpet; though instead of arriving at a firm bottom beneath, the deeper I pierced through it, the softer it seemed to become. Not wishing, therefore, to disappear altogether beneath the stage of this world's scenes, I saw that there was nothing for it but to keep constantly in motion, though not encouraged to rash haste by Alister's informing me that when he had visited the loch on a former occasion, a friend who accompanied him, in his anxiety to secure a duck which he had winged, rushed forward too rashly, and suddenly losing the support of the sedge carpet beneath, was precipitated into a hole so deep that he entirely disappeared, with the exception of his coat-tails and the stock of his gun; and that, on emerging, after floundering about in a very lively fashion, he declared that though upwards of six feet in height, he had discovered no bottom.

Cautiously therefore I advanced and steadily, not allowing myself to penetrate too far into the layer of vegetable network, and yet feeling my way as I put forward each foot. Soon, however, I considerably recovered my confidence, and was thrown off my guard when a small flock of ducks rose from the reeds a few yards in advance. We all fired right and left, bringing down four; Alister his couple, and Walter and myself each a single bird. Several more were put up by the shots; some of which left for the sea, flying over our heads at a great height, while others dropped again at the further end of the loch. We quickly secured three of the fallen birds, but the fourth, which was only winged, being Alister's second, and a long shot, baffled us for some time. Indeed we had lost it altogether, when the gillie came upon it quite accidentally, and seized it before it had time, impeded as it was by the weeds, to dive and get away again.

We now walked on for some distance without finding any more; but at last put up another flock, out of which Alister and I bagged each our bird; Walter wounding one, a very long shot, which eventually fell at the further end, where several more of the flock, evidently young though of a fair size, also alighted again; while the old birds kept wheeling round in the air above us, or went away altogether. It was now clear that most of the full-grown birds had left the loch, and that they were chiefly young ones which had collected at the far end; thither therefore we at once determined to make our way, as well as we could. Having marked carefully the spot at which Walter's wounded bird had dropped, I proceeded thither to secure it if possible, the gillie and retriever accompanying me at intervals of a few yards. A solitary drake getting up in our front, fell to my gun and was soon secured; we then reached the spot where I had previously marked the young bird down; but for some time our search was in vain. At length, however, when the gillie and dog had wandered some distance away from me, the former wading, the latter swimming, I suddenly came upon the object of our search, sitting in an open space almost free from weeds, a few yards in advance of me; and approaching very cautiously, while the bird was looking at me with a stupid fascinating gaze, I made a sudden spring forward and seized him, but at the same instant found myself in much deeper water, and I could scarce stifle a sob as my boots were speedily filled. But it was not till I gained the

dry land that I realized fully the discomfort of waterproofs: for then, though my companions were shaking off the wet, or losing it through the convenient cracks in their boots, my superior outfit retained it all; and since to remove them, nearly amounted to pulling my legs from their sockets, I was compelled to throw myself on the ground on my back, and by putting up mylegs in a some what novel and picturesque position, let the water turn out the same way by which it had entered. This operation, however, did not much mend matters; for most of the water, finding its way up my trousers, then ran very unpleasantly along my backbone, making me, if possible, more wet and uncomfortable than I had been before.

But to return: we were soon at the part of the loch where the remnant of the ducks had congregated; and here we found them tolerably thick. Driven as it were to their last stronghold, they seemed reluctant to quit it, and rose, one by one, in straggling disorder. I secured three more, making in all seven to my own gun; my companions counting one or two more. We then returned to the marshy ground, shot a snipe or two, and started for home with a fair bag; though taking into consideration the number of birds that went away, we had not killed as many as we might have expected, or as had frequently, Alister assured me, been killed on former occasions. Winter, however, is a more favourable season for duck-shooting; these birds (as well as geese, and occasionally a few swans) then lining the shores of the inlets and firths in vast numbers, and a clever shot may then have excellent sport. I was lately told by a gentleman that he had known as many as forty-three wild geese killed at one shot with a punt gun. But such wholesale butchery, however advantageous in a mercenary view, does not recommend itself to our admiration; nor does it afford that pleasing variety of incident which is the chief inducement to the amateur sportsman, and which may be best obtained with the common gun.

My next is the narrative of a day's shooting along the cliffs, occurring about the same time as the preceding.

Having enjoyed some good and exciting sport on a seal-shooting excursion a few years ago, though in a different neighbourhood, I was very anxious to try my luck again, having heard that a seal or two were occasionally seen in the bay hard by.

Alister offered to accompany me, and as the cliffs were well stocked with rabbits and numbers of wild rock-pigeons, which latter frequented the caves worn in the rock by some volcanic agency operating untold ages ago, while further on was a small heronry, we armed ourselves with ammunition adapted to these several varieties of game, and taking boat started in quest of adventure.

The morning was fine and sunny, the sea unruffled by one breath of wind. For some time we drifted about with the tide, or were propelled by two sturdy Highlanders along the shore, ever and anon threading our course about the rocks, which rose like so many pinnacles from the ocean's bed,—Nature here, as ever, pointing heavenwards,—but not a seal was to be seen, and we were fain to content ourselves with the winged inhabitants of the shore, or the rabbits which were visible, hopping among the rocks, and feeding fearlessly where there seemed barely footing for an insect, or room for a spider to hang his web. Occasionally the boatmen pointed out to us a part of the cliff where some unlucky wight had lost his life, or some projecting rock whereon whilom a venturous boat had been dashed, when vainly battling with the violence of the storm; at the same time pleasantly assuring us, that, though all around was now calm enough to satisfy the most fastidious, yet nothing could be more treacherous than those waves, and that it was quite within the bounds of possibility that a few moments might see them lashed into fury, and ourselves—: but I forbear; no water-wraith crossed our bows, nothing that the most superstitious could construe into an evil omen, cast a shadow on our spirits, or marred the beauty or serenity of the scene. We reached the first of a series of caves, and pausing before its mouth, one of the boatmen threw in a stone. We heard the sound as it bounded from rock to rock, and then pitched musically into the still water below. Immediately there followed a confused sound of the flapping of many wings within the dusky chamber, and then issued forth a flock of pigeons, their blue and mottled feathers sparkling like a myriad of jewels as they emerged into the sunshine. And now as they darted off in every direction, jostling each other in their fright, we shot at random among them, and brought down three at once, a fourth falling at a little distance. This process was repeated at each successive cave; though the birds which we had previously alarmed, many of them

passed on, and took shelter in the caves ahead of us, thus rousing many others before our approach; and as we moved on we found them more on the alert, and prepared to anticipate us by flight.

Having enjoyed considerable amusement in this way, we passed on to a part of the shore where the cliff was clothed with short turf almost down to the water's edge, and scattered over with blocks of stone of various shapes and dimensions. Here we saw the rabbits feeding, and gambling about in numbers; many at too great a height to be within range, while others were sufficiently low to offer a shot, had they not sought shelter behind the blocks of stone as we approached. We had therefore to "bide our time," and take an occasional "pop-shot" whenever one, more venturesome than the rest, left his position and exposed himself to view. Many a shot was thus fired in vain, and eventually, after landing and attempting, at the imminent peril of our shins and necks, to drive them from their places of security, we once more betook ourselves to the water, with not more than five or six of them as the guerdon of our pains.

Our next point was the hernery, which we found at a short distance further along the shore; and I could not but admire the skill with which these birds had chosen the *locale* of their colony. The position was of this character,—a diminutive bay or cove, above which the butting cliff, scooped out into a semicircular form, rose perpendicularly from the beach to a height of between three and four hundred feet, its face clad with a huge forest of ivy, hanging in massy folds of luxuriant drapery, and springing from two or three stems, thick as the boll of an ordinary oak. The spot was indeed a miniature model of that quiet little cove within which Æneas and his "defessi Æneadæ" once sought shelter and repose from the rude tossings of the deep, with more than one brave comrade missing.

> "Hinc atque hinc vastæ rupes, geminique minantur
> In cœlum scopuli."

While thus fortified on either hand by nature, and rendered completely inaccessible by land, the roughness of the sea, which generally lashed itself into foam on the opposing rocks, formed so strong a barrier on the only side from which approach was possible, that it was only in the calmest weather that a boat ventured to make the

attempt. Here then, in a retirement seldom disturbed, the heron could peaceably hatch and rear her young, looking on with sovereign indifference as the waves chafed harmlessly below, and laughing as they strove in vain rivalry to reach her elevated throne. And here, should she ever have to forage at a distance, though the beach at hand could generally supply her with food, she could leave her tender brood with a feeling of security seldom disappointed, save when haply some winged marauder bore off one of her darlings to feed his own gaping young in the summits of the neighbouring mountain.

The nests, some twenty or thirty in number, built in the ivy, looked like so many huge bundles of sticks and rubbish; but the most curious sight was to see the birds rise at our approach. The heron, as he flies slowly through the air, has usually a somewhat stately bearing; but on the present occasion, as they rose affrighted at the unusual apparition of our boat, the appearance they presented, with head, legs, and wings all stretched to the utmost in opposite directions, was most undignified and ludicrous. The flesh of the heron, though not considered a delicacy, is by no means unpalatable, and may be cooked in the form of a pie, which is very savoury. The fat, too, which is found on the breast of this bird is very rich, and useful when rubbed on a fishing-rod as you lay it by for the winter, serving as a preservative alike against damp and dryness. Herons feed chiefly, though not entirely, by moonlight; consequently they are fattest at the full moon, and lose flesh as it wanes.

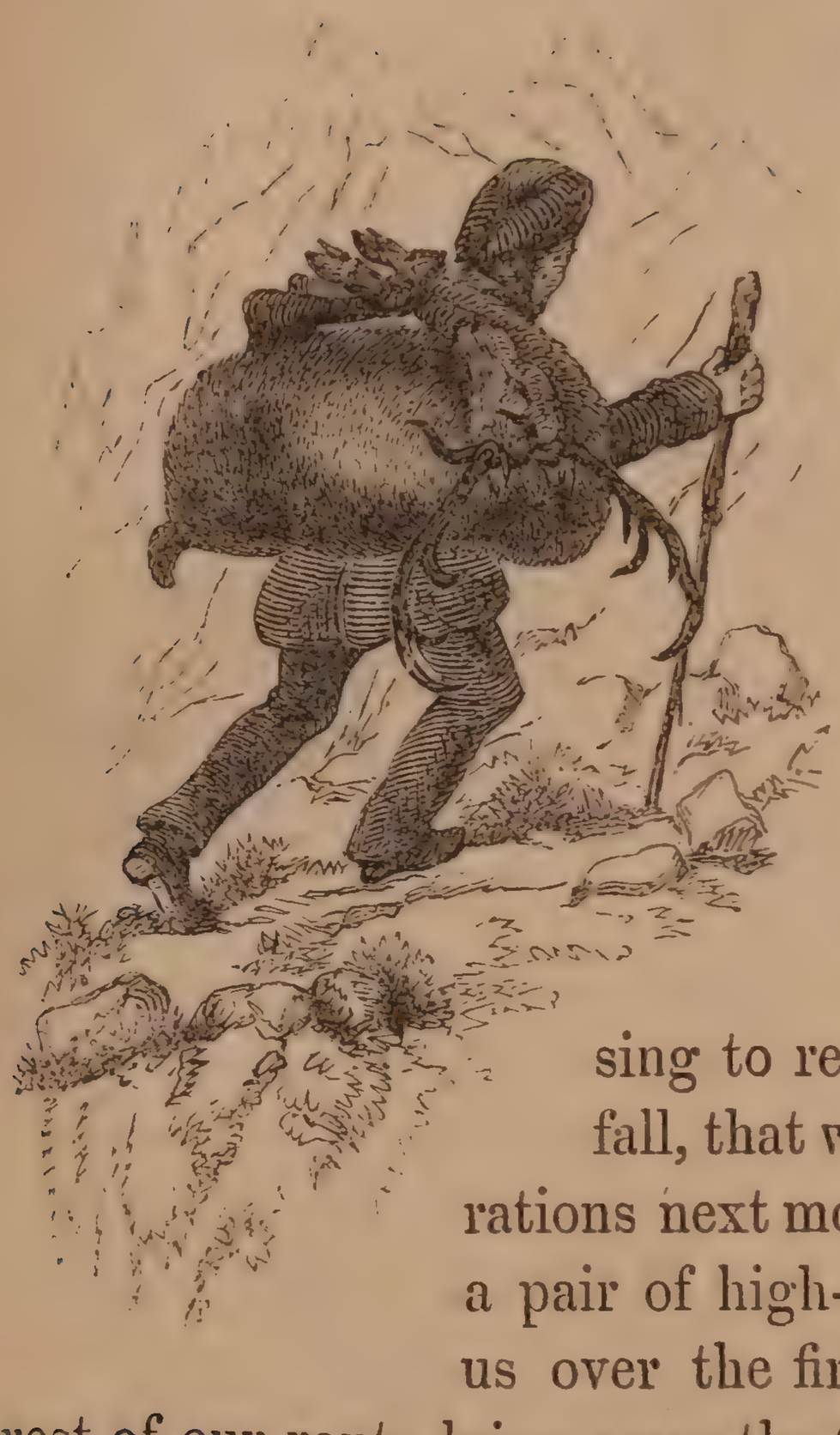
I remember on one occasion, at the time of the harvest moon, when the nights are lightest, as we were following the course of a mountain stream, we put up a heron occupied in fishing a snug little pool; and passing again the following day, we found him in the same spot, lying dead by the waterside; having been killed probably by an eagle, or some large hawk. His breast was ript open, and the layer of fat exposed to view was fully an inch and a half in thickness.

But to return to my narrative. On our reaching the hernery, the birds rose one and all from their nests, and after standing for a moment, balancing themselves in the most awkward manner possible, each on his or her own bundle of sticks, they rose into the air with a scream; and then, wheeling about over our heads for a

few moments, gradually flew off to a more secure distance. Partly for the sake of their flesh, partly for their feathers, and partly for their fat, we shot three; and one of the boatmen detecting two or three tall necks stretching upwards from one of the nests, I attempted to clamber up the ivy, in the hopes of securing a young one. The undertaking, however, I found more difficult than I had anticipated; and though I succeeded in ascending a considerable height, I was eventually compelled to give up the attempt, after more than once narrowly escaping a fall. One of the boatmen now made the essay; and though in appearance a large-boned, broad-shouldered, heavy fellow, with no signs of agility about him, yet he steadily persevered, until at length, in spite of crushing ivy and crumbling rock, he descended, and laid a young heron at my feet. The bird was almost fully fledged, and capable of feeding itself, and we determined to carry it home as a pet for some of the ladies, though I may as well add that, after having put us to no slight trouble to supply it daily with small fish, which it would only eat when quite fresh, before a week was gone the pet had taken to itself wings and disappeared.



LETTER IX.



Once more I return to the antlered denizen of the forest. On Monday we started for another residence of two or three days in the little cottage among the hills, which serves as a shooting-box whenever the sport proposed is deer-stalking; the forest being at too great a distance to allow of our returning to head-quarters every night.

We set off about noon, proposing to reach the cottage shortly before nightfall, that we might be ready to commence operations next morning at sunrise. A car, drawn by a pair of high-spirited Highland ponies, conveyed us over the first six miles of the road, when, the rest of our route lying acros the "muir and the mountain," we were fain to commit ourselves to our legs. Gillespie, the fox-hunter, and Murdoch attended as gillies, to carry our provisions; while Walter and I ourselves took charge of the arms and ammunition.

Thus heavily accoutred, we found the ascent of Ben Fuoghlin no slight task. The sun was pouring down his rays, unchilled by a breath of air, unbroken or tempered by a passing cloud, while we toiled up the steep. As I looked, with a longing eye and parched throat, at the many little springs and burns we passed, gushing merrily and tunefully on their way, I fancied I could almost realize to myself the feelings of the traveller who, in crossing the deserts of Arabia, is lured further and further from his way by the spectral river, which either continues ever at the same distance, receding as

he advances, or melts into nothingness just as he fondly thinks he is about to be refreshed. For though here there was water enough and to spare, I had learnt by unpleasant experience that in climbing among the mountains it is the worst thing in the world to gratify one's thirst by constantly taking a draught, however small; and the utmost I dare allow myself was to moisten my lips, and occasionally to rinse out my mouth. But to everything there is an end, and two hours' hard climbing brought us to the brow of the hill. Here we paused, to drink in eagerly the refreshing breeze that crept up from the strath beyond, and commencing the descent, three quarters of an hour's tumbling and scrambling brought us to the cottage.

Our load of provisions deposited, there being yet two hours before sunset, we took out our telescopes, and subjected the opposite side of the strath to a most careful scrutiny, but in vain; after running our eyes up every ravine and gully, and slowly traversing each open stretch of moorland, we each returned our glass to its case, and proceeded to take a stroll along the banks of the river which wound through the bottom of the valley.

'T was a lovely evening, and as the sun sank to the horizon, tipping the summits of the hills with gold, and tingeing the cliffs around to a copper hue, here and there, when a ray still shot down some gorge, the rocks looked like one stream of burning lava, while the light and shade, everywhere thrown out in bold relief, produced a very striking effect. The flies, which were floating sleepily in small *nebulæ* over the surface of the water, were occasionally roused into quicker motion by the lazy flap of a salmon's tail, as he engulphed two or three of them together. Anon the water-ousel shot out from his perch under the bank, and scudding down the stream, sought his meal in the shallows. A slight whizzing noise overhead told of the woodcock taking his recreation in the cool of the evening; or a note, something like the coo of the dove, reminded us that even he forgot not his vesper hymn.

As we were retracing our steps a light breeze sprang up, a few clouds floated over the tops of the nearest hill, and in a few moments a slight sprinkling of rain caused us to accelerate our steps. We reached the cottage, to find a meal prepared for us by the shepherd's wife, consisting of boiled venison ham,—to which,

as well as the next course of porridge and delicious cream, we did ample justice.

During the night there was a goodly fall of rain, the wind increasing almost to a hurricane; and when we rose in the morning, though the air was again clear, and the sky nearly cloudless, Gillespie expressed his doubts as to whether we could make anything of it today from the violence of the wind. However, as anything was preferable to a day spent withindoors, with no resources to fly to for amusement, we decided on sallying forth, and making the best of it. We took our way, therefore, with the fox-hunter as our guide, along the bottom of a deep glen, thinking that there, at least, we should meet with less wind than in the more exposed regions above; but we soon found that there was no escaping it. Such a wind I certainly never before experienced. Each successive blast seemed to pierce through one's dress, searching and chilling to the very bones and marrow. Now and then, as it whirled violently round the angles of some huge rock, a sharp report was produced, like the crack of a hunting-whip; so that the approach of a blast might be learnt while yet at a distance, the sounds increasing in loudness as the distance diminished; while far above us, in the clefts of the high cliff which shot up almost perpendicularly to a height of 1500 feet, there was a continual roar, loud as that of the ocean in the fiercest storm.

As we passed along the shores of a secluded loch, the sheltered waters of which are generally smooth and unruffled as a mirror, the effect produced was curious in the extreme. The blasts sometimes poured down from all quarters of the compass at once, and meeting in fierce collision, drove the surface into large waves, and lashing the water up bodily into the air, carried it along like a drenching rain; then separating, they ploughed up the loch in opposite directions; or chasing each other across its bosom, left their wake marked by a line of foam. On looking up the mountain-side, I could almost have fancied myself in a most densely populated country, where the hearths of some thousands of families, the cottages themselves invisible, were sending up their smoke in so many thin white columns curling heavenwards,—an appearance which was produced by the fierce currents of air catching up the waters of many a little burn as they swept athwart its rocky channel.

After a walk of some five miles, without seeing anything in the shape of game, we reached a deep corrie, the usual resort of deer in rough weather; but though we seated ourselves under shelter of a rock, and scanned every foot of ground before us, we could make out nothing. However, the lowest depths of the place had not yet been penetrated by the sun's rays, and it was possible that something might still be lying in the shade; we therefore descended, and traversed the shores of the loch lying below, keeping a careful look-out as we advanced; but again we were doomed to disappointment, the deer having evidently sought shelter elsewhere.

We now wound our way up a rocky ravine, at one time the wind blowing from behind, and almost carrying us up the steep without any exertion of our own; at another time meeting us with such force, that we could make no head against it; and when it suddenly lulled, we almost fell on our faces, as though some great support had just been withdrawn. Scarcely, perhaps, had we recovered ourselves, when a blast would tear down the pass with such fearful violence, as required all our strength to prevent our being carried bodily down the hill, for a moment actually depriving us of the power of breathing, and producing a choking sensation, akin to that which the swimmer experiences when, as he is tossing among the breakers, he suddenly gets a mouthful of brine, or takes too long a dive in the depths below.

In the face of such difficulties the ascent was a matter of time and patience, and it was with no feeling of reluctance that, on reaching the top of the ravine, I threw myself on the heather to recover breath, while the fox-hunter, without any signs of distress, quietly seated himself beside me, and began to take his observations. I watched his countenance, as his glass was turned from brae to brae, from gully to gully; but the stolid expression, so characteristic of the Scot, furnished no clue to the workings of the mind within. I fancied, however, after a time, that his eye seemed to linger, and turn more especially to one spot, but nothing like a smile of satisfaction was to be detected. At length, on my putting the question to him, he replied that he "was seeing the deer," but that they were "unco" hard to get at, and that no calculation as to wind could possibly be made with any certainty while it was blowing in such fitful and fickle gusts. There was no help for it,

therefore, but to look to the general scud of the wind, and to act accordingly, leaving the issue to the chapter of accidents. The deer were feeding at the distance of nearly two miles, separated from us by a deep glen, and at an elevation slightly higher than our own; but as they were working upwards, before we could get over the ground they would doubtless be considerably higher. Our plan therefore was to take a wide circuit, and make for the shelter of some cliffs a few hundred feet above them, in the hopes that they would gradually feed up, and pass near our position.

Having strengthened ourselves with a "nip" of usquebagh, away we went in a silent string, now running recklessly "over bank, bush, and scaur," now stooping, and even creeping, as we passed an exposed spot; and ever and anon pausing, while Gillespie took a cautious survey, lest we should disturb anything in our course, and perhaps through heedlessness lose a better chance than the one on which we were now bent.

After mounting a steep brae, we suddenly came upon a stag and two hinds, lying in a sheltered hollow. They had winded us however, and rose from their beds in the tall heather just as we came over the crest of the ascent; and before we could get a shot, had disappeared over a precipice, down the difficult face of which they wound their way in safety; and when we came to look over the edge of it, they were trotting along several hundred feet below. As we turned away from watching them, we caught sight of a herd of about forty, in a contrary direction, just vanishing over a distant hill, having winded us and taken alarm. Shortly after this we reached the rocky pass, where we had expected to fall in with our three deer. Before however taking up our position, we proceeded to reconnoitre the ground, in the direction by which they must come; but the most careful examination could discover no trace of them. There were indeed "numberous" slots, or footprints, which Gillespie pointed out to us in the very pass itself, but none which seemed fresh; and our conclusion therefore was, that the game must have taken some unexpected turn, and gone away by a different route.

We now made for a rocky kind of headland, which projected into the air, commanding a good view over some likely ground; and here we once more brought our glasses into play. But so piercingly cold was the wind, and so unfavourable from its changeableness,

that in despair we were almost inclined to give up further attempts for today, and, as we sickened of the work, became also proportionably careless.

A sudden gust of wind now carried my hat away, bursting a very strong elastic band, which passed under my chin, and at the same moment, a large loose "poncho" of Walter's was torn from his shoulders, and carried high into the air, spinning round, as it ascended, in corkscrew fashion. The coat was recovered by Gillespie at once; but the hat, though I myself lost sight of it altogether, was recovered by Murdoch at the distance of a quarter of a mile. Taking this as a seasonable warning of the treatment we might ourselves expect, should we any longer tempt the elements, we commenced the descent at once, purposing to make our way back to the cottage as fast and as safely as we could. We had not however made much progress, following each other in a careless line, with feelings somewhat akin to disgust, when, on turning the angle of a huge rock, Gillespie, who led the line, suddenly came to a halt; my ears were greeted with a grunt and something suspiciously like a Gaelic oath, and following the direction of his eyes, I immediately saw the cause of his discomposure. There, at the distance of two hundred yards, were the three deer for which we had been looking, leisurely trotting away from us. They paused on reaching the crest of the ravine down which they were about to plunge, turned round for one moment to look at us, and then, flinging a parting challenge to us, as they spurred up the ground with their hoofs, disappeared in an instant from our sight. They were a noble hart, a young stag, and a hind; and as they stood on the horizon, thrown out in bold relief into the sky, a more beautiful group it would be difficult to conceive.

As we followed slowly in their track, picking our way carefully down the almost precipitous descent, we observed a stag and two hinds, feeding on the opposite side of the valley, in a position apparently very difficult to approach, without attracting their attention. We lingered for some time, hoping that they might feed their way into more favourable ground; but presently the three, which we had so lately disturbed, were seen winding their way up to them, having crossed the valley below; and the whole six, shortly joining company, went off together.

Thus terminated the series of this day's disappointments. The shades of evening were coming on apace; the ground was too rugged to be either safe or pleasant for a night march; and as we were still distant some seven miles from the cottage, no time was to be lost. Glad then were we, after nearly two hours of hard climbing, toiling, and running, to hear our welcome from the cheerful housewife, to divest ourselves of our wet toggery, and to seat ourselves before a large peat fire, blazing on the hearth, with walls three feet thick to shut out the wind, and a well-loaded board wherefrom to console the inner man.

After doing justice to the cold grouse, venison cutlet, porridge and cream, as they only can whose limbs have been braced, whose spirits have been exhilarated, and whose appetites have been sharpened by mountain air and mountain exercise, we turned our feet to the hearth; and there, over a glass of fine old mountain dew, theorized over the events of the day; discovering with singular acuteness, now that it was too late to remedy them, the point where each blunder had been committed, and the exact cause of each failure; forgetting forsooth, in our self-complacency, as too many other wiseacres had done before us, that it is a far easier matter to criticize than to originate; that the veriest blockhead may see where another has erred, but, set him to act himself, and it is ten to one he will not mend the matter. At an early hour we threw ourselves on our couch, hoping to rise in the morning with more propitious weather. But it was in vain, for some time at least, that we sought repose. The wind had increased to a perfect tempest, and though our eyelids weighed heavily, the uproar without would not suffer us to slumber. Indeed each moment threatened a catastrophe, and kept us on the alert. The approach of every consecutive blast could be distinctly traced by the ear, as we lay listening on our heather pallet. First, there was a low sound, a kind of suppressed roar, as the wind soughed and eddied its way along the face of a huge cliff, distant about a mile, and rising perpendicularly to the height of nearly fifteen hundred feet. Then followed a steady rushing noise, as it swept furiously across the loch, and over the open moor below, with nothing to check its progress. This was in turn succeeded by a variety of sounds, as the blast drew nearer, and whistled or cracked among the rocks or banks in the vicinity of the cottage. And

lastly, came a furious rush, as it careered madly past our little cabin, catching up the gravel and stones, which rattled violently against the door and window, threatening to tear away the roof over our heads, and making the very walls themselves vibrate around us, though they were fully three feet in thickness. How stones and mortar could hold together, under so fearful and incessant a cannonade, 't were hard to tell; but though sorely tried, our stout little castle did nevertheless succeed in keeping its own; and one after another the consecutive blasts slunk away with a sullen murmur of disappointment, after venting their fury, and discharging their artillery upon its walls in vain.

At length, shortly after midnight, we fancied that the uproar was slightly abated; presently there was a sensible diminution; and while we were waiting, and hoping for its total subsidence, sleep with downy pinion brooded over us, and we became unconscious.

* * * * * * * *

While we were wrapt in slumber, and dreaming of the forest and its antlered occupants, a great change was taking place around us. The wind fell, and, as is frequently the case, was succeeded by rain; not indeed a gentle shower, nor yet a short but brisk one, but a steady regular downfall, heavy enough to saturate almost anything. The roof of the cottage, at no time of the best, had not been bettered by the storm of the last few hours; and I was first brought to a consciousness of what was going on around me, by a something pattering on my head at short intervals, and trickling slowly and chillingly down my neck. This was the rain oozing through the roof; and on looking about I perceived several little pools, forming from the same cause, in different parts of the room. In one corner a series of drops were quietly following each other down the barrel of a rifle, to the improvement of the powder. In another place they were collecting inside one of my boots. Here they were diluting the cream on the shelf; there they were reducing the lump-sugar to a pulp. Indeed almost the only dry place of any size was that under shelter of the table.

This was, in sooth, a cheering prospect! and as I sprang out of bed, and anxiously opened the door, the sight which greeted my eyes was not calculated to console for the distress within. On all

sides the rain was coming straight down, and seemed likely to continue; not a break was there in the clouds, to fan the faintest hope into life. Down the face of the big cliff, Creag-na-sturm, when between times I could see so far, what had been yesterday but a tiny jet of spray, stretching like a white thread from top to bottom, was now one broad sheet of foam, pouring furiously over its surface, and taking the whole distance in three or four tremendous leaps; while countless minor streams spread and crossed in every direction, like a veil of fine lace covering the features of a dark beauty. Though fully a mile distant, their combined voices seemed to reach my ear, above the sound of the rain. In other quarters too I could distinguish similar changes; burns had grown into rivers, and the river itself was swollen in proportion. While I was marking all this, in mood disconsolate, the shepherd emerged from his cottage with the remark, sympathetic, but not consolatory, "'Deed, sir, but the day 's no that promising." "I am afraid, Rorie, it promises only disappointment;" was the only rejoinder I could make.

We were now all speedily aroused, and a council of war held. We decided that the first step must be, to break our fast; the second, to examine our arsenal, clean what needed it; and then, should the day be still unfavourable, to amuse ourselves as best we might, by listening to the fox-hunter's tales of adventure, of which I was assured he had a goodly store.

The guns, on inspection, proved to be very foul; being all loaded with ball, and having on the previous evening been left just as we had brought them home; but though then quite clean and fit for immediate use, the rain of the night had rusted them very much, besides damping the powder. The process of cleaning, and our breakfast, occupied an hour or more; and then, the prospect being still gloomy as it could well be, we called upon the fox-hunter to draw from the treasures of his memory "things new and old."

Behold us, then, as the curtain rises:—Walter and myself stretched lazily on the couch; Gillespie and the shepherd perched on broken chairs. The lips of the former are unsealed by a dram taken "neat," followed by the usual preliminary, a pinch of "sneeshin." Our first story relates to the length of a deer's life.

There is a tradition preserved in the family of the Mackenzies of Brahan Castle, to the following effect.

Many generations ago, the male calf of a red deer was reared as a pet in the family. Though a great favourite while young and harmless, its popularity gradually declined as its age increased, and its play became rough and even dangerous. Allowed to roam at large, bearing a silver collar about its neck, as the badge of servitude, it eventually broke away from this easy thraldom, and returned to its native hills. Still, however, less timid than its brethren, it continued occasionally to be seen, as it crossed the path of the huntsman; but the silver charm about its neck purchased for it a comparative immunity from danger; the rifle was never directed, nor the deerhound slipt against the former favourite of the castle. But these chance meetings became less and less frequent, until at length they ceased altogether; and the deer was either not seen or not recognized any longer.

Some years ago, a stag was killed in the forest of Brahan; and the flesher, in cutting open the skin of the throat, felt his knife strike against some hard substance, which would not yield to his blade. An investigation laid bare a silver collar, deeply imbedded in the flesh, and bearing an inscription to the effect that the deer had been reared by the Mackenzies of Brahan upwards of a hundred years before.

Of the merits of this story I leave others to judge. Naturalists have, I believe, assigned forty years as the ordinary term of a deer's life. This animal, therefore, if the tradition be true, out-nestored Nestor.

Our next is the narrative of an event in which, judging by the zest with which he related it, I should suspect the narrator himself to have had a share, though to have insinuated my suspicions would have been to beard the lion, and bring the "skene dhu" from its sheath.

The scene is a natural cavern in the wild side of Ben Fionan, to which has been assigned the title of "the King's Cove," or Uaigh nam Riogh, from a traditionary belief, still prevalent in the neighbourhood, that it served as a place of rest for some Scandinavian prince on his hunting excursions, in an age long since passed away; a purpose which it has doubtless served on many an occasion of later date, to the benighted poacher, who, with perhaps less right, but equal skill and ardour, has sought his pastime in the forest.

The following are the particulars. On a dark and howling night, within the damp and lichen-covered walls of the King's Cave, were congregated a band of poachers, who had long levied their "black mail" on the forest, in the form of fat bucks, stately stags, and yeld hinds, and whose sagacity had baffled the utmost skill and vigilance of the keepers and foresters of the district. Thus, inured to danger, their highland spirits, naturally bold and energetic, had acquired a degree of reckless daring which rendered it hazardous to interfere with them; and though liberal rewards were held out to the keepers who should detect and bring the offenders to justice, those officials were sufficiently acquainted with the numbers and the character of the men they had to deal with, to shrink from bringing matters to a crisis; and preferring to connive at what their own interest and safety deterred them from preventing, so long as depredations were not too flagrant, they studiously avoided any collision with the marauders.

On the occasion in question, the party assembled was composed of some of the most notorious and daring individuals in the neighbourhood. The storms of the previous day had driven the deer in large numbers to the shelter of the corrie below the cave; and the object of the band was to await the dawn, and then, intercepting the herd as they took their departure by a favourite pass to the more secluded heights above, to single out the finest for their own use.

It so chanced that one of the foresters, by name Donald Oag, or the younger Donald, was returning from his rounds on the mountain. The storm had detained him to a later hour than usual in some sheltered cranny; and the shades of evening had been succeeded by the gloom of night, ere his homeward route brought him by the foot of Ben Fionan. Passing within a few yards of the King's Cave, he was surprised on seeing rays of light issuing forth in a long stream from the cheerful blaze of a fire within its gloomy *penetralia;* and on scrambling some little distance up the rugged path leading to the entrance, his astonishment was increased by the scene which revealed itself. In the centre of the cavern was a huge fire, composed of the dry heather which had formed the pallet of some former occupant; and around it were seated some ten or twelve Highlanders. Seldom was seen a group more worthy of the painter's brush, from the glitter of the fire-arms and the picturesque atti-

tudes of the company; the effect of their stalwart limbs and swarthy complexions being heightened by the deep gloom in the background, while the fitful glare of the fire gave an additional interest to their countenances, already sufficiently animated from the effects of the whisky, which was passing freely round.

For some moments Donald looked on in astonishment. The men were not unknown to him, and he had little doubt as to the object of their visit to such a spot. But while thus watching, he gathered from their vehement gestures and loud tones, that a conversation was going on in which all seemed more than usually interested. Incited by curiosity, he silently drew nearer, in order, if possible, to overhear what was said; and now he stood within the entrance of the cave itself, but hidden from its inmates in the gloom. At this very moment, what was his amazement and alarm, on hearing his own name mentioned. At first it occurred to him that his presence was known, and he was just about to take to flight, when, on second thoughts, he determined to hear further, and satisfy his increasing curiosity. He now learnt that the party were discussing the possibility of being discovered; one out of the number suggesting that the fire's light might attract the attention of some of the keepers, should any be abroad. "And what if Donald Oag should, himself, walk in?" said one, with a loud laugh. "What!" replied the deep voice of another. "What! why, before ever that blaze lit up his cowardly een, I would just give him this ounce of lead in his black heart;" and suiting the action to the word, the stout Highlander sprang to his feet, put his piece to his shoulder, and glanced fiercely down the barrel, exactly in the direction of the spot where the keeper was standing concealed. Though this sentiment was not greeted with applause by his companions, who, bad as they might be, were yet not prepared for such an extreme, the determined tone in which it was uttered, and the sudden action of the speaker, quite overcame the keeper. Assured, from previous knowledge of the man, that he was one who would execute his threat as readily as he had given utterance to it, Donald remained, as it were, spell-bound, though his limbs tottered beneath him, and the heart in his bosom palpitated almost audibly. For some moments he stood thus rooted to the spot; and then, the conversation taking another turn, he slowly and silently withdrew from his dangerous position;

and once fairly out of sight and hearing, took to his heels and never even paused until his own door, doubly bolted and barred, intervened between himself and the forest.

That night the slumbers of Donald Oag were troubled and feverish. Again he trembled beneath the fierce eye of the poacher glaring upon him; again his ears rang with those angry tones, and the threat they conveyed. His anxious spouse at length drew from him a reluctant recital of the cause of his uneasiness; and it is said, that such was the effect of her bitter taunts, and the contempt with which she upbraided him for the want of spirit he had exhibited, that, convinced of his previous shortcomings, he became thenceforward a totally altered being.

"What!" cried she, "shall ilka stane i' the forest be red wi' the bluid o' deer? An' will ye bring us a' till poverty an' shame, forby yer ain cowardly heart daresna' do its duty?"

That day proved the turning-point in Donald's career. Henceforth it became the object of his life to suppress the lawless proceedings at which he had hitherto connived; and while no one was a more determined foe to the poacher, not only did he rise in the estimation of his employers, but even his enemies could not but respect him for his conscientious discharge of duty. Such eventually was the effect of his firm and judicious administration, that poaching gradually ceased, until over those hills which had so lately been infested by these human vermin, the deer at length roamed in security.

Such are two of the stories with which we were entertained by the fox-hunter, while the weather without was still unpropitious as ever; and within, but for the warming effects of the toddy, it would not have been much better. Other stories did he recite, but though interesting when told in all the poetry of Gaelic, they would suffer materially by the loss of pathos and expression which a translation fails adequately to reproduce. But I could not help thinking how the naturalist must envy the opportunities for observation enjoyed by such an one as the man before me; whose daily occupation requires that his life should be spent chiefly in the open air, by the loch or the mountain,—sometimes for days together with no roof above his head, save the vaulted sky, and with no companionship but that of his faithful dogs.

At one time, it may be, he is laying siege to the den of some vixen, and patiently watching for the appearance of the mother and her cubs. There he sits for one, two, or even, as he himself assured me, three days without sleep, and with no nourishment beyond that afforded by the juniper-berries which grow close at hand, and the small flask of whisky in his "sporran;" and soothed by that "little tube of mighty power,"—"rest to the weary, to the hungry food,"—his pipe; until, eventually overcome by the pangs of hunger, one by one the animals are forced to capitulate, and emerging from their retreat, far down in the cleft of some rock, fall victims to his unerring aim. On such occasions he is frequently accompanied by another man, and then the two relieve each other, watching and resting by turns, by which plan the fatigue is very much lessened. Gillespie however assured us that he far preferred having all the fatigue to himself; for that if he took his turn of repose, he could never rest from his anxiety lest the other party, less interested than himself, should slumber at his post, and so suffer the game to escape. Indeed, he remembered on one occasion having a wild Irishman to assist him, who, having slept the greater part of the first two days, then agreed to take his turn at watching; but scarcely had Gillespie rolled himself in his plaid, when he was aroused by the report of a gun close by, and springing to his feet, saw to his dismay the whole family of foxes scampering across the moor, and his companion gazing after them in mute amazement. The stupid fellow had gone off to quench his thirst at the burn hard by, and the cunning animals seizing the opportunity, had escaped with only a random shot as he returned to his post. "Faith," said Pat, "but they would n't wait for me;" a remark however, which brought no consolation to the fox-hunter, who after nearly two days of sleepless watching found his labour thus provokingly undone, and his reward snatched from his grasp.

Such is one of the duties of this most necessary appendage to a Highland farm,—a duty calculated, as I have said, to afford him abundance of time for the study of Nature.

There are other vermin also which he has to hunt down in the mountains, assisted by his hardy pack of curs. The chief of these perhaps is the marten, whose abode is in the rock, and who is as great a foe to the game as the fox to the sheep. And often does

the rocky glen ring with the music of his hounds as they chase the marten to his stronghold.

Many a day, too, he spends in the forest, tracking the deer, watching their movements for hours, in order to stalk them successfully; or possibly sitting the long day through beside the carcase of some slaughtered monarch of the forest, till his comrades can arrive to help in bearing the body homewards.

Thus is the Highlander brought to witness the grandest effects and combinations of nature and the elements. He is on the shores of the loch when the curtains of mist roll aside, and bare its bosom to the morning sun. He is there when the dews of evening sparkle on the heather bell, and the misty drapery once more descends as a veil on the waters. He hears the thunder-clap echoed through the mountain with the crash of a ruined world; or the roar of the wind as it sweeps through the forest like "a giant refreshed with wine." As he sits by the mossy marge of the burn, the shadowy form of the water-wraith flits across his bewildered een, or he hears the moan of some restless spirit in the soughing of the summer breeze. The howl of the wild-cat, the cry of the heron, disturbed at his moonlight meal, the curlew's plaintive note, and many another sound of life, to him have each their tale to tell. The phantom fire that twinkles on the bog, the varying shadows thrown by the moon across the moor, betoken to him the presence of beings of another mould.

With such opportunities then for observation, such seasons for thought, such ample scope for fancy, and such scenery withal, to afford inspiration, 't would indeed be no wonder were the language of the Gael instinct with the power of poesy; while each untutored child of the mist and the mountain, with no other book to read but that lying open on his native hills, might cherish the spirit as well as the speech of an Ossian.

P.S.—I subjoin a curious anecdote, recently related to me by Alister, as he received it from the mouth of the person concerned, a keeper employed in the adjoining forest.

"I was ordered to get a good stag for his Lordship, just about the beginning of the rutting season. Soon after entering the forest, and near the top of Corr-an-Finnoch, I noticed a very large beast

lying by itself; which, on an examination through the glass, puzzled me very much, as it was evidently of the largest stag size, and yet had no antlers, but apparently the head of a hind. I stalked it to within about seventy yards, and sat down to await the time when it should rise for its afternoon feed, that I might then ascertain surely what it was. The day however being rather stormy, a puff of wind wheeled my scent round to him, and of course he was on his feet in a moment, and another moment had carried him over a slight eminence, that concealed him from my sight for more than a hundred yards.

"But before he had gone far, he fell in with a few small stags, who were bellowing amongst a lot of hinds. These he charged, and having vanquished them all, once more lay quietly down. I now knew that I had before me one of the largest deer I had ever seen; and after a little trouble, I was again within shot, and sent a ball through his heart. He never got on his legs again. My astonishment may be conceived, when I examined his head,—five and three-quarter inches between the eyes; his body was the biggest and heaviest I ever saw in the forest."

Alister has the skull now in his possession; he prizes it very highly, and has had it fitted up as a drinking-cup.

LETTER X.

I RESUME the account of our expedition to the hills, at the point up to which my last carried us.

The approach of evening brought an improvement in the weather; the rain gradually ceased, and the sun at length burst through his cloudy veil, giving promise of a fine sunset, and consequently better hopes for the morrow. It was too late however to attempt anything today, except in the immediate vicinity; and accordingly we sallied forth, armed myself with rifle and Walter with gun, to enjoy the two remaining hours of daylight, that, if nothing more could be gained, we might at least acquire an appetite for our dinner.

On the opposite bank of the river, running at the bottom of the strath, the hills rose very precipitously, their sides here and there intersected by a deep ravine, worn by the rains of many a storm, within the shelter of which, in the most severe weather, the deer were not unfrequently driven from the more exposed heights above. There was also a strath running off at right angles to that which we were traversing, having at its further end a deep basin-shaped hollow, or corrie, perfectly sheltered from the wind, excepting in one direction, hemmed in as it was on three sides by rocks of a great height, their bald summits unclad by a blade of vegetation. Though for some unaccountable reason this was a locality little frequented by deer, still stray ones, often the finest, were occasionally compelled thither, as to a harbour of refuge from the angry elements.

To these ravines, therefore, and to this corrie we determined to confine ourselves for the brief remaining portion of the day. But the river had first to be crossed, and on reaching its bank we found it so swollen from the rain, that, hesitating to cross, we proceeded to follow its course, hoping that at some one of its many turns we might find a ford where the passage would be less dangerous. It was not, however, till we had walked more than a mile, that a place

was found which the fox-hunter volunteered to ford, that we might learn the depth of the water. Plunging in, he succeeded, by his intimate knowledge of the bed, in gaining the further bank in safety; but with such difficulty, that we at once declined to follow. We therefore sent him alone across a low stretch of moorland to inspect the corrie, and then report to us if any game were to be seen; while we ourselves, sitting down by a solitary rock, took out our "Dollonds," and proceeded to scrutinize the opposite ravines.

In this way some time was spent, but nothing discovered. And now we began to look anxiously for Gillespie's return. We had watched him gain an elevated "know," commanding a view into the depths of the corrie; but he had now left it, and disappeared altogether. We sat for some time waiting, but still he did not appear; and now the shades of evening were coming on apace, and our view each moment more contracted. At length, tired out, and certain that even had he found any game, it was now too late to attempt a stalk, we slowly turned our steps homewards, still anxious lest the man should be overtaken by the dark, and crossing the river in the gloaming, uncertain of his way, should be carried down by its waters. But never was anxiety thrown away on a subject less needing it. In the forest he knew almost every stone, and on the river he was acquainted with each ford, rapid, and pool. On approaching the cottage we were agreeably surprised to see the cause of our uneasiness himself advancing to meet us. He had examined not only the corrie, but the ravines; and recollecting that there was a more favourable spot for crossing the river higher up, he had gone thither, and so taken a shorter route home than the winding course we had pursued. He had found no traces of deer, but that, he concluded, was so much the more in favour of our finding them elsewhere on the morrow. It was, therefore, with spirits considerably revived that we again entered our cabin, the roof of which the shepherd had, during our brief absence, been patching up, while his wife had arranged the interior in a more comfortable fashion.

Thursday.—The small hours of the morning were already passed, and the sun high in the heavens, when a colloquy carried on outside our door between Gillespie and the shepherd roused us from our slumbers. The god of the morning was pouring a rich flood

of golden rays through the small dingy lattice of our cabin; and when we stepped forth, everything around savoured of health and freshness. The balmy air, the invigorating breeze, the scent of the heather-bloom, freshened by yesterday's rain, all fell gratefully on the senses, and confirmed our hopes of success.

No sooner was breakfast over, than without further delay our guns were carefully examined, and we set out. Three-quarters of an hour brought us to a heather-clad "know," whence we had a view into Cohr-an-dhu. Here, lying at full length, we took out our glasses, and examined the bottom and sides of the corrie. For some time nothing was to be seen; but at length three deer were detected feeding their way up the brae towards the Bealloch Mohr. Unfortunately they were approaching "the march;" consequently it was of little use to follow them, until we should see whether they crossed it or not. At length the matter was decided, as one by one they rose above the horizon, stood out distinctly into the sky, and then passing the boundary, placed themselves, for today at least, beyond the reach of our bullets.

We now struck off to the left across a stretch of moorland, for a glen buried among huge rocks and crags, where Gillespie told us the deer frequently rested between their morning and midday feeds. After a pause of some minutes at the head of the glen, for the purpose of reconnoitring, Gillespie descried a large stag, but at so great a distance, that not even with the aid of my telescope could I make him out distinctly. His position, however, was so very unfavourable for stalking, that the fox-hunter suggested, as our only chance, that we should take a wide circuit, so as to come in upon the animal, by the course of a burn, taking advantage of several masses of rock conveniently scattered about the ground so as to hide our approach. Accordingly, as this seemed the only plan likely to succeed, we proceeded without further loss of time to put it into execution. But the circuit we had to take proved much longer than we had anticipated; and after three miles of incessant climbing and running, we were scarcely nearer our object than at first. Soon however we had the wind in our teeth, and then altering our course began the approach in good earnest. As we were out of sight for some distance there was no need of caution, but presently we had to move with the greatest circumspection and vigi-

lance; pausing continually, to see exactly where to go next, and watching lest the deer, having changed his position, should suddenly come in sight and discover us.

Whilst occupied in this way, and running forward across an open bit of ground, a sudden movement of Gillespie's brought us all to our knees; and slowly raising our heads, we beheld three deer,—a calf, a hind, and a stag,—feeding leisurely and unsuspiciously, rather less than a quarter of a mile to our front.

We now paused to recover breath, and make sure that the deer were not alarmed. After sitting for a few moments, we again looked up, and still they were evidently unsuspicious of our vicinity. Their heads were all turned away, and the stag's wide antlers were visible projecting beyond his haunches on either side, as he slowly grazed along. Deer generally feed down the wind,—an arrangement by which they can scent everything in the rear, while their acute vision detects everything to the front. On the present occasion, however, this order was reversed, and the deer completely off their guard, which gave us a great advantage. The stag having a fine head, we cast to the winds all thoughts of the previous object of our manœuvres, and proceeded to stalk the game before us.

The ground being too open to admit of an easy approach, we commenced operations by creeping slowly forward on our hands and knees. But our progress, though slow, was sure; and we found ourselves gaining ground without detection. At length, when almost within shot, and with our guns cocked, prepared for immediate action, Gillespie, who was creeping just in advance of me, suddenly paused, and touching me on the shoulder, pointed significantly to the right; there, to our utter confusion and disappointment, was a fine stag within eighty yards of us, standing on a projecting rock, and staring at us in astonishment; but before a gun could be brought to bear upon him, he had disappeared behind the rock and was safe. Of course the three deer which we were stalking, instantly took the alarm, and made off uninjured. We now ran forward to see what we could of the vanished game; and on mounting the rock behind which the stag had disappeared, we saw a vast herd, of some sixty or seventy head, going away at full gallop. They were joined, just after we caught sight of them, by a large stag and several young deer coming up from some lower ground in front.

The large stag Gillespie immediately pronounced to be the one which we had previously seen lying alone, and which we were about to stalk when we came in view of those feeding together.

This was provoking enough. It was evident that the whole herd were now thoroughly alarmed, and no prospect of our coming near them again today. However, there was no help for it; aud disappointed and dispirited though we were, we lost no time in making the best we could of a bad case. Having, therefore, watched the fast-receding herd until they became lost in the dim distance, and Gillespie with his telescope had made out the ground for which they were aiming, we started, at his suggestion, to examine a fresh region, where there was a likelihood of finding game which had not yet been disturbed.

After walking for upwards of an hour, we reached a sheltered hollow, overhung by a range of cliffs of moderate height. Abounding in tall heather, which afforded a warm lair for the deer, and intersected by a small rocky stream, it was altogether a very likely spot; and Gillespie made his dispositions accordingly. I was to be located at a pass by which the deer usually took their departure; Walter was to creep down to a projecting rock, whence he might secure a shot, should there be anything lying under the cliff; while Gillespie was to survey the glen from a third position. Everything being thus settled, we started for our several posts.

Having reached the pass, which I found not more than fifty yards wide, so that, should the deer come that way, I could not fail to have a good chance of success, I ensconced myself quietly behind a rock, and waited the result. Having continued here for some time without anything occurring, I began to fear that we were once more disappointed, when my ear suddenly caught the sharp crack of Walter's rifle, followed, after a moment's pause, by a second.

It was now evident that some game had been found; but whether I was to share in the sport, or not, remained to be seen. At once, however, cocking my gun, I strained my ears, expecting each moment to catch the first sounds of the retreating deer, as they galloped up the steep ascent; but they came not. At length, satisfied that they must have taken a different route, I left my position, and started with all speed to rejoin Walter.

Breathless with excitement and exertion, I presently joined my

friend, just as he had reloaded his two barrels; and following with my eye the direction indicated by his digit, I perceived four deer—two hinds and a stag—cantering up the further end of the glen, followed at a considerable interval by a large stag, evidently much disabled, though making immense efforts to keep within sight of his companions.

Gillespie had surveyed the valley from a point whence he could see all the ground below, except the part lying immediately at the base of the cliff. Discovering nothing, he then returned to Walter; and both of them creeping forward, looked cautiously over the very brink of the cliff. Gillespie was taking his observations with all the care of a "canny Scot," slowly advancing his head, inch by inch, over the edge of the rock, when he became aware of a fine pair of antlers, rising from the base of the cliff immediately beneath his position. Without exposing himself any further, he slowly withdrew, and Walter took his place. Scarcely, however, had the latter caught sight of the tips of the horns below, when an old hind stepped forward and snuffed the air suspiciously. She was immediately joined by a second hind and two stags; and now all four stood together, evidently on the alert and uneasy.

Walter remained perfectly motionless, lest by the least movement he should discover himself to the wary animals. Presently the hinds began to move off; and as Gillespie said the stags would speedily follow, there seemed to be nothing for it but to fire; though therefore the shot would be a long one, and it is always uncertain work to fire down from higher ground, Walter reluctantly took aim and pulled trigger.

From the sound of the shot, Gillespie was of opinion that one of the stags was wounded; but neither of them evinced any signs of distress; Walter therefore again stepped forward, and delivered his second barrel. The deer, though at first puzzled, now seemed to have discovered in which quarter lay the danger, and without further delay made off; but it was very soon clear that the shots had told, when one of them dropping behind, was speedily left in the lurch by his uncommiserating friends.

It was at this juncture in affairs that I arrived. Walter's two barrels were reloaded; and, at the imminent peril of our necks, we both scrambled recklessly down the face of the cliff, trusting to the

frail support of decaying roots or dry tufts of heather and grass; until, rather by luck than management, we once more stood on *terra firma*. Gillespie remained behind, stationed on a high crag, whence he might watch the movements of the deer and signalize to us below.

At the very instant we sprang forward from the foot of the cliff, the wounded stag disappeared in the burn; and we hastened forward, hoping to surprise him while still cooling his burning tongue; but he soon emerged; and, refreshed by his bath, pursued his course up the brae at so brisk a pace as quickly to leave us far behind and shortly afterwards turning the angle of a plateau of rock, was lost to view. Still however we hastened on, hoping that he would again grow faint from loss of blood, the traces of which we discovered here and there as we followed in his track.

On looking round for Gillespie, we saw him descending the face of the cliff, with the speed and agility of a cat; and presently he overtook us, with the tidings that he had seen the stag lie down, apparently exhausted; and he undertook to lead us directly to the spot, which he had carefully marked before leaving his post. This was indeed good news. Night was coming on, and we had feared another unsuccessful day; but now there seemed a good prospect of a fortunate termination to our labours, and under the guidance of our veteran leader we once more pressed eagerly forward.

Having clambered as silently and expeditiously as possible up the rocky bed of the burn, Gillespie paused for a few minutes to reconnoitre, as we were now close upon the spot where the wounded animal had lain down. Cautiously lifting his head, he peered through the heather; but nothing was visible. Concluding, therefore, that the deer was lying in a hollow, we cocked our guns, and rose simultaneously above the bank; but what was our disappointment, on finding that the game had decamped. There remained indeed in the peat soil before us the impression of his body, but that was all; nor could we discover further traces. A few steps in one direction brought us to the hard rock, in another to deep heather, neither of which afforded us any clue to his movements. As a last resource, we separated, in the hopes that by wandering in different directions, one or other of us might be so fortunate as to cross his path. But no such luck; the mystery remained unsolved.

After roaming for some minutes, anxiously searching each hollow and scanning every brae, we were suddenly summoned by a shrill whistle from our guide. On joining him, we received the agreeable tidings that he had discovered four deer, feeding in very favourable ground; and though reluctant to abandon the pursuit of the wounded deer, to die of its wounds, as it probably would before morning, we gladly agreed to follow Gillespie's suggestion, and again try our fortune. It was now so dusk, that none but the most experienced eye could detect the game, which could not be much less than half a mile distant. No time was therefore to be lost; and putting ourselves completely into the hands of the fox-hunter, we commenced what we knew must be the final stalk of the day.

Gillespie seemed very confident of success, provided only we would implicitly obey his directions,—a stipulation to which we were only too willing to accede. Promising therefore to imitate his movements, and not expose ourselves to view, more than was absolutely necessary, we started.

For some time we hurried along one behind another, in a line; now running, now creeping on all fours, and occasionally pausing to recover breath, while our guide took an observation from the shelter of a rock or bank. Not a word was spoken; and we therefore moved forward, perfectly uncertain.what a moment might bring forth. In this way we had blindly followed our guide for some time, when at length we made a long pause, while he looked cautiously over the cliff in front. From the business-like air with which he performed the operation, I suspected that we must be getting near the game, but was scarcely prepared for his interrupting me, as I was just about to speak, with the words, "An ye speak they 'll be hearing ye." I very quickly however sprang to my feet, and then he whispered to me that the deer were within shot. It was now arranged that I should creep forward to have the first chance, Walter being close behind, to put in his fire immediately after. Creeping therefore gently along the rock, I slowly advanced my gun over its edge, and then myself cautiously peered into the hollow below. What a sight greeted my eye! Within sixty yards were two stags and a couple of hinds, feeding fearlessly, in total ignorance of our vicinity. It seemed cruel to mar the happiness of such a scene, and yet the opportunity was not to be lost. I aimed at the largest stag, and fired. The effect produced was cu-

rious. Confused by the echoes, which rebounded from the rocks in every direction, and utterly uncertain in what quarter the enemy was situated, the four animals rushed together, and stood as though in deep consultation, forming a most beautiful group, and still within an easy shot. My ball did not appear to have taken effect; aiming therefore a second time at the same animal, and with more care than before, I again fired, and this time the shot told effectually. The poor creature staggered a few paces forward, and then fell to the ground. There was no time however for exultation; the other three were still in confusion and dismay, uncertain which way to run; and Walter, stepping forward, fired at the remaining stag. The first barrel wounded; the second was a failure; and the stag began to make off at a slow pace, preceded at a short distance by the hinds.

Meanwhile my gun was reloaded, and leaving Walter to "gralloch" the prostrate animal, I sprang forward in pursuit of the wounded fugitive.

Elated by success, and animated by hopes of further slaughter, I scarce heeded where I was going. On however I went, in hot pursuit, at one time plunging into a bog, the bottom of which I never reached; at another, leaping recklessly down the face of a crag; and more than once wonderfully escaping the fracture of some of my limbs; until at length, when well-nigh exhausted, and pausing for an instant to recover breath, I found myself approaching a small mountain "tarn," the stag still about two hundred yards ahead. On reaching the above, he took to the water without a pause and swam out, while I stopped to recover myself and watch his movements. The loch was of no great size, and I purposed, having once made out where he was likely to land, to hasten round and meet him. But I was saved further exertion; for exhausted by loss of blood, and the prolonged struggle, after swimming about one hundred yards into the loch, the poor animal was forced to relinquish his attempt, and return to the shore. Concealing myself therefore behind a rock, I awaited his approach, ready to put an end to his sufferings, when he should reach the shore. Presently, however, finding himself within his depth, the creature stopped, and though I waited for some time, he did not appear disposed to advance any further; wearied therefore of waiting, I put my gun to my shoulder, and

resting it steadily on the rock, aimed close to his ear and fired. The ball entered the animal's brain, and falling gently over without a struggle, he floated on his side, a lifeless corpse.

Thus, in a few moments I had slain one stag, and given the finishing blow to a second. The sun had now sunk below the horizon, the moon was shining brightly overhead, and a sharp frost was crisping the heather and grass, while my own clothes were becoming unpleasantly stiff and cold. Reluctant therefore to plunge into the chilly waters of the loch, I left the carcase to float for awhile, and sat myself down, until Walter and Gillespie should arrive. Presently I heard their voices, as they came down the hill, and in a few moments they were at my side, having "gralloched" my stag, and deposited him safely in a snug cleft of the rock, until further assistance in removing it could be procured on the morrow.

On seeing the second animal dead, and floating in the loch, Gillespie gave vent to his feelings in sundry rapturous expressions and animated gesticulations; then stepping into the water, regardless alike of wet and cold, he quickly brought the body ashore. To drag it to the shelter of a neighbouring cliff, and there cover it over with stones and heather, was but the work of a few moments. Then taking a "nip" of whisky all round, we started for the cottage in high spirits and at a brisk pace. Though the day had been long and tiring, and we had yet fully seven miles before us, the walk proved most enjoyable. The night was very beautiful, and the whole scene impressive in the extreme. As I passed along, and marked the moonbeams, now dancing in the spray of some mountain torrent, or anon piercing the mist, which rolled like drapery over the loch, I could well understand how the vivid imagination of the Gael, as he lingered in pensive moments among such scenes, had peopled his native hills with a shadowy world; how the water-wraith, the kelpie, and the fairy, had sprung Minerva-like from his brain, and become almost inseparably entwined with his creed.

We reached the cottage, just as Murdoch, whom we had sent off in the morning to bring a fresh supply of provisions from the Laird's, had arrived. He brought sufficient for the demands of the night and following morning, but no more; being the bearer of a message, to the effect that our presence was requested at home on the morrow evening, when our host expected his nearest neighbours, (who by-

the-bye lived sixteen miles off, a short distance in the Highlands), to partake of his hospitality.

After making a most vigorous onslaught upon this fresh contribution to our larder, we proceeded, over a glass of usquebagh—golden-coloured from its age in the cask—to discuss the merits of our day's performance. It was impossible not to admire the unpretending yet skilful manner in which the fox-hunter had done his work in the last stalk; how he had calculated the scud of the wind, the nature of the ground, and all the many other *pros* and *cons* which bore upon the issue.

I believe it has been said by some great military captain, that he owed all his skill in the ready disposition of his forces, and in quickly seizing upon the advantages of any locality, to the days he had spent among the hills in pursuit of their noblest game. And where indeed could he find a better school, wherein to acquire, not in theory only, but in practice, the art and highest requirements of generalship? Nowhere is sagacity more requisite; nowhere does promptitude in action tell more forcibly on the result, or fertility of resource more constantly bring its reward. To scan at a glance the several features of the ground before him,—to mark the windings of each burn, the sweep of every brae, or the bearings of every undulation, and so to form his plans, without previous opportunity for consideration, so, as it were, to play the cards he holds as will best tell upon the result, —this is the deer-stalker's constant occupation; this the exercise to which he devotes his deepest thoughts and highest energies.

Friday, a fine day, though rather too windy.—Murdoch is despatched home, to procure additional hands, to assist in the conveyance of the slaughtered deer. We are in a district too hilly to admit of the use of either vehicle or cattle, and accordingly the only mode of transporting the game to the larder, when once slaughtered, is across the brawny shoulders of a Highlander. Now, a good-sized stag is no slight burden; I speak by conjecture, but I should imagine that the weight of either of the two killed yesterday could not have been less than fifteen or sixteen stone. It is therefore beyond the powers of any one ordinary man to carry such a load some thirteen or fourteen miles, over ground too rugged to be traversed at any time by any but the powerful and athletic.

Murdoch then is dismissed on his errand; while Gillespie, Walter,

and I start, immediately after an early breakfast, to search for the wounded stag, which disappeared so mysteriously yesterday.

For two hours we pursued our way without incident. At length a mountain hare crossed our path, having already partially acquired its winter coat of white; and as the agile animal bounded up the hill-side to our right, springing from rock to rock, it more resembled a tiny flake of snow, rising to the clouds which capped the summits above, than a living thing of earth.

Gillespie shrewdly remarked that the creature "wad na hae been ganging that gait," unless something else had been on the move to alarm it; and accordingly we soon discovered two hinds and a stag going away to our left. Had we been even commonly vigilant, we might have had a very fair opportunity for stalking; but the deer seldom frequenting that part of the ground, we had crossed it carelessly, and exposed ourselves to view, when concealment would have cost us little more trouble. We now soon reached the scene of yesterday's adventure; but though we left not a glen or hollow unexplored, though we followed the course of every burn, and visited every spot where the animal could have sought shelter, not a trace of him could we discover. In this manner the morning slipped away. The ground had been so thoroughly disturbed yesterday that not a deer was to be seen; and it was not till two o'clock that we discovered three feeding, but at so great a distance and in such difficult ground, that it would require two hours to stalk them; and as we had a walk of not less than fourteen or fifteen miles between us and home, that was out of the question. Accordingly seeing that further sport, for today at least, was not to be had, we started for the Laird's, where, after a smart walk of four hours, over ground that would try to the utmost your southron nerves, we arrived in time for a hearty welcome, a hospitable meal, and pleasant company.

LETTER XI.



A FEW days subsequent to the events recorded in the last letter, we went on a fishing expedition, to a loch situated at a considerable height among the hills, where the trout were said to be both remarkably fine in size and choice in flavour. As it was late in the season very good sport was not to be expected, but as a small boat had been conveyed to the loch at no slight trouble, we thought it best to seize the opportunity for a little pleasing variety in our amusements. The oft-mentioned trap, with a pair of Highland ponies, served us in good stead over the first six miles of our journey. There we put up our cattle at the melancholy skeleton of what had once been a small wayside inn, rejoicing in the name of 'The Argyle Arms,' and which as a jolly public had held out its sign, glorying in all the glitter of heraldry, ere the increased demand for deer-forests and grouse-preserves had depopulated this along with many another district, once teeming with inhabitants, and transplanted happy hearts and loyal spirits to pine in distant and ungenial climes. Though many was the gallon of usquebagh which had been drunk by its social hearth; though its walls had often echoed to the drone of the piper, and its floors to the stamp of the Highland fling, no hostess now welcomed us

at the door, and as we stood in the deserted rooms, no glass in the windows sheltered us from the passing gust. Though there were two small hovels near at hand, still tenanted, a wren twittering in the half-fallen chimney was the sole lingering inhabitant of the house itself, and our ponies only fed on the corn we had ourselves brought for them.

Leaving, however, this melancholy scene and its sad associations behind us, we soon forgot them, as we climbed the mountain-side, and drank in the invigorating breeze, which played about the rocky pass leading to the loch which was to be the scene of the day's amusement. An hour's labour brought us to the spot, where the boat lay buried in heather, to shield it from the rays of the sun. With the aid of Donald, who had accompanied us, to carry provisions and make himself generally useful, the little skiff was soon launched upon the curling waters, and we began operations.

Walter and Donald took the boat, and pulling across the loch, proceeded to let out a long line, having attached to it, at intervals of three or four yards, a number of hooks baited with worm. Meanwhile I wandered round the shore with a light rod, and tried my luck with the red hackle and a black gnat. The sun was however too powerful; and though occasionally a good fish cautiously drew near and inspected my fly, only two or three small ones were tempted to try its merits, and they shortly found their way into my creel. At length the line, now fully baited and let out, was left suspended from sundry floats, made of small bundles of sedge; and entering the boat, I proceeded to try the effect of the fly in the deep water, further from the shore. Still, however, only small fish were to be had; and after patiently lashing the loch for upwards of an hour, I again landed, and, as an amusement, commenced a sketch of the spot, which was very picturesque.

Meanwhile Walter and Donald took up the baited line; and, judging by the noise they made over the occupation, the enjoyment must have been rare indeed. Rowing slowly along the line, wherever they found a fish hooked, it was transferred to the boat, and the hook baited afresh. Occasionally as they approached a victim, of a size rather larger than ordinary, there was a great commotion and splashing; and more than once, as the two, in their hurry to seize the prize, rushed to the same side of the boat, the little vessel was

within an inch of being capsized, crew, cargo, and all; whereupon there arose a peal of laughter, waking the echoes of the hills around, and rousing the grouse in their heathery beds.

While sitting occupied on my sketch, or watching the party in the boat, my attention was attracted by a sound somewhat resembling the bark of a dog, which seemed gradually approaching from behind. I looked round, expecting to see some shepherd make his appearance over the rising ground to my rear; but nothing presented itself. In another moment the same sound was heard again, this time immediately overhead, and on looking up I at once recognized the author of it, in a noble eagle, sailing majestically along, almost within shot, the very picture of proud indifference and kingly dignity. I watched the stately bird, as he winged his way towards his throne, in the storm-battered heights of a mountain, five or six miles distant; and then packing up my sketching materials, proceeded to join my companions, who were now making for the shore, bent on discussing the viands which Donald had brought for our consumption.

Though the season was far advanced, the air was still mild; and indeed in the sheltered spot which we selected, a bosky "neuk," at the head of a tiny inlet, lying on my back, beneath a sun pouring down his rays through a cloudless sky, I could have fancied it still the height of summer.

In this manner a pleasant hour or more was passed; and then as the sun began to decline in the west, observing that the fish were dimpling the surface of the loch, apparently in considerable numbers, I once more resumed my rod, and this time with more success. Taking my stand on the extreme point of a little rocky promontory, jutting out into the deeper water, I cast my flies out as far as possible; and now the chief difficulty arose, not from the scarcity of the fish, but from their numbers, as they quite jostled each other about the hook in jealous rivalry. In this way several were pricked, or being imperfectly hooked made their escape; not a few of them, however, were secured. I seemed indeed, from the number of rises, to have fallen in with a large shoal, and for upwards of an hour the sport was excellent. At the expiration of that time, as the sun was now set, and we had some distance to journey, and moreover the fish were becoming wary and difficult

to catch, I put up my tackle, and pouring the contents of my creel on the ground, counted thirty-two fish, most of them, as I conjectured, above half a pound, three between two and three pound, and one, a fine fellow, who could not weigh much under four pound.

On joining Walter, I found that the line had produced about the same number as the rod; his fish however averaging a greater size than mine, though none of them quite equalled my best.

By the time our tackle, etc. were stowed away, and the boat drawn up and once more shrouded in heather, Night had thrown her sable mantle over the mountains, and we found travelling over the rugged ground difficult, and the somewhat deep descent to the inn attended even with some danger. Twice I narrowly escaped being precipitated down a fall of several feet, and before we gained the 'Argyle Arms,' had fathomed the miry depths of more than one peat-bog. We reached home however without further incident, having had a very pleasant day, and though not sport of the highest order, yet good as the season of the year could warrant us in expecting.

Of two expeditions in quest of sport among the roe-deer, which came off shortly after the above, I shall not pause to speak, as they were attended by no success.

The following is the description of an excursion to a low-lying loch, into which the sea found its way at the highest tides, thus making the water almost as salt as that of the sea itself, and bringing a periodical importation of sea-trout as well as herrings; the former of which sometimes afforded excellent sport, while the latter served chiefly as food to the merganser, and other varieties of water-fowl.

Here, having no boat, we were forced to fish from the shore, and the exuberant crop of weeds which extended round the loch proved a great hindrance to sport. No sooner was a fish hooked, than, darting down into the tangled forest below, he left the book clinging to some stubborn water-plant, from which it was with difficulty extricated. Though therefore we wandered round the shore, occasionally catching a small fish, all the larger ones made their escape, frequently causing the loss of the fly. And soon tiring of such tame amusement, we put up our tackle, and were about to start for home, when Donald discovered, carefully concealed beneath the heather, a

well-known contrivance for fishing, belonging, no doubt, to some of the shepherds, and yclept, from its deadly effects, the "otter."

As you are doubtless unacquainted with this, one of the most effective weapons of the Highlander for securing his daily meal, I will devote a few lines to a description of it. It consists of a small board, fastened to a string, in the same manner and on the same principle as that of the common kite, with which we entertained our boyhood, so that, when the string is pulled by a person walking along the shore, the board, being previously thrown into the water, darts out to the furthest distance allowed by the string; and as the walker advances along the shore, the "otter" traces out a parallel path through the water. To this board are attached a number of hooks, baited with fly or worm, according to the day, the fish, or the locality; and to this simple contrivance, there being no fisherman visible to create alarm, the best and most wary fish frequently become victims.

The otter then, thus opportunely discovered, was soon armed with its full complement of hooks, and a place being selected where the weeds least obstructed the passage, it was thrown out, and once beyond the range of the weeds, started steadily on its experimental voyage.

We had not watched its progress long, when a sudden dash, followed by no slight commotion in the water, told that a fair-sized fish had been hooked. Nothing deterred however by the warning thus afforded them, others speedily followed the example, and ere long almost every hook carried its fish. When, taking advantage of the first opening in the weeds, we drew the otter ashore, and along with it ten fish of various sizes and weights, from four or five ounces up to a couple of pounds. This process repeated thrice, we started for home, with rather more than thirty fish, as the joint production of rod and otter.

The incident I now purpose recording, though not in any way associated with sport, is nevertheless of no small interest from its peculiar character, being an example of the mode in which a wedding and its festivities are commonly celebrated in the Highlands. The parties concerned were, as might be presumed, of a humble rank in life, the bride being the daughter of a shepherd on the laird's farm, and the bridegroom himself another member of the same corps.

There being no minister or kirk within sixteen miles, a species of compromise was made between the two parties, that dignitary undertaking to meet the wedding couple and their friends halfway, and to perform the ceremony in a cottage conveniently situated by the roadside.

On occasions of this kind open house is kept, frequently for several days, and the capacities of every cottage in the immediate vicinity are tested to the utmost, the invitations being, by traditionary custom, general, and the number of guests unlimited.

The company having collected at an early hour, set out on their walk of eight miles, to the number of about a score, and having met their minister at the appointed place, had the important rite performed, and then, in the most business-like manner, turned their faces homewards. Halfway back however a ferry had to be crossed; and as the ferryman, an old friend, could not leave his post to join in the festivities at home, what more neighbourly than to stay and dance with him there? At once therefore forming into couples, they ranged themselves on the deck of the ferry-barge, and while the men took it by turns to chant, thus with their mouths alone performing the functions of both pipe and piper, the rest commenced the dance in the most determined manner. Highland flings were succeeded by reels, and reels in turn made way for the strathspey, until between the warmth of a blazing sun, and the effect of their own exertions, they had had enough of it. Whereupon the journey home was resumed, after the dancing had been kept up with conscientious regularity and unflagging spirit for two good hours.

Arrived at home, their numbers being now increased by the accession of new-comers, the whole party partook of the shepherd's hospitality; and after but a few moments' rest, the dancing recommenced with renewed spirit, to be kept up almost without interruption till the morrow's dawn. Such were the proceedings of the day as related to me by others; those of the evening and night I for the most part witnessed myself, and, as I witnessed, shall relate them.

The bride's mother having formerly been an old and valued servant in the Laird's establishment, her son Sandy was sent up to request, as a special favour, that we would attend the party in the evening, that the Southrons might witness the manner in which a

Highland wedding was conducted, an opportunity of which I was by no means loath to take advantage. The invitation therefore was accepted, and we promised to vouchsafe our august presence.

Arriving about eight o'clock, we were ushered into what passed on the occasion for the banquet-room, a small apartment open to the smoke-blackened rafters of the roof, and occupied by one large four-post bed. Two tables were so placed as to form one long festive board, extending down the middle of the room; long planks, placed on rough blocks of stone, forming the seats. The housewife, a pleasing exception to the generality of her class in Scotland, being of a very neat and cleanly appearance, welcomed us with smiles, prophetic of the best cheer her house could afford, and I was placed in the post of honour, at the head of the table.

Everything about us partook of the cleanliness of the presiding genius of the place, and the whole arrangement appeared most appropriate. We were first invited to a "wee drop o' whisky," which we took "neat," in small glasses. Tea was then brought in by a comely sister of the bride, and the most select of the guests invited to join us. To a description of these I must devote a few lines.

First came the bride herself. Though not remarkable for any great beauty, her downcast countenance and diffident manner showed a painful consciousness that she was, for the time being, the cynosure of all eyes, a distinction to which she was evidently quite unaccustomed. I was subsequently however informed, that on such occasions generally it is deemed unbecoming in a bride to raise her eyes from the ground, or her head from her breast.

The next who entered was the son of a respectable merchant from the neighbouring village (distant sixteen miles); he was described to me as a "cannie laddie," who might have turned his hand to anything, but for an unfortunate tendency to roaming habits, which led him to attend all the weddings in the country-side, and militated against application to any regular calling. His conversation certainly surprised me, exhibiting a degree of taste and development of the understanding which I have never met with in one of the same rank on our side the border.

The third individual whom I shall mention, as bearing upon a circumstance almost peculiar to Scotland and the Scotch, was a man of a fine open countenance, beaming with intelligence as well as

good-nature. Though himself only a shepherd, his father had been a worthy minister of the Established Church, who, dying at an early age, had left his children totally unprovided for, and they accordingly, forced to shift for themselves as best they could, were content with such vocations as were honest and respectable, though not elevated.

It seems one of the peculiar features of the Scotch as a nation, that you constantly meet, even in the lowest ranks, with persons whose relatives, and frequently near relatives, are or have been in a considerably higher walk in life. The causes of this are not difficult to trace. The old feelings of clanship, though now for the most part quite in abeyance, have not only stamped their impression on the face of society, but wormed their way deep into its innermost workings. High and low have always been closely knit together. The lowest retainer once called his chief a kinsman; and not unfrequently the future chieftain was brought up as foster-brother with the son of the humblest among his father's followers. Thus it came to pass that there did not exist that immeasurable distance, that insuperable barrier, between those of gentle blood and the low-born which obtains in England. Thrown together in their daily sports and occupations, taught by constant warfare mutually to value each other's goodwill and services, the highest and the lowest might be seen mixing freely together, and even bound by the strongest ties of friendship and affection. Now all this could not be without its effect; and, though as English manners and English feelings gain ground a gradual change will come over the features of the picture, yet this will be one of the last points to fade in the dissolving view. Nor indeed is the change one to be desired, for from this constant and unconstrained intercourse of the different ranks has arisen an inborn propriety of manner, and an easy self-possession in the presence of his superiors, still conspicuous in the Highlander, and which gives him a decided advantage over the clownish shyness of the peasantry of England.

I remember remarking this particularly on a late occasion, when in a small town in the Highlands. I witnessed the population, high and low, mingling in their games (which they did almost every evening) on a piece of ground thrown open to them by one of the first noblemen in the country, who himself joined, heart and soul, in the

diversions of his dependants. Though no respect was wanting as he moved among them, yet there was none of that open-mouthed gazing or that awe-stricken awkwardness which would have shown itself in an English crowd under similar circumstances. All was natural, easy, and unconstrained, and never did I witness anything which realized to my mind so completely the state of things in former days, when the chieftain was not only the ruler, but the friend and protector of all in his clan.

Such was the school in which those habits and feelings were formed which the Highlander of the present day still inherits. And this inborn self-possession tends greatly to the advantage of the people who are so constituted. Hence it is that a Scotchman, put him where you will, almost invariably "falls on his legs." Does adversity overtake him? in the hour of need he can look around him with composure, and, influenced by no feelings of caste, can calmly mould himself to circumstances, turn to any calling which may seem to him best, and, provided it be an honest one, he loses nothing in his own eyes or those of others. The son of a minister may keep sheep upon the hills, and though his flock come of a different race from that of his father, he need not feel out of his element. And scarcely is there a part of the globe where this does not find corroboration. "From sunburnt south to icy north," the sons of Caledonia are to be found carving out their fortunes, making themselves at home in the midst of difficulties, feathering their nests in the face of hardship, and withal playing no unimportant part in the great game of life.

"Cœlum, non animum mutant, qui trans mare currunt,"

was a true saying of Flaccus; and go where you will, you will find it verified in the Scot, ever conspicuous for the same composed and cautious, yet sagacious, bold, and enterprising nature.

Sandy Macintosh, the minister's son, had his parallel in the bride herself, whose mother was the niece of a quondam captain in the Navy.

But I must now once more to my story, which has been interrupted too long by this digression.

Our tea over, which had been attended by only a few, we were ushered into the ball-room, if that name can appropriately be assigned to a chamber smaller than the one already described, and lit up by

two or three farthing dips. Here the scene was amusing, and to me quite new. Huddled up in one corner of the room were all the ladies, the gentlemen standing in the doorway, or on the fireless hearth, their heads halfway up the capacious and projecting chimney, or sitting on a large box by the wall. As we entered, a reel was about to begin; but though there were upwards of thirty people assembled, no more than four could find room to dance comfortably at once. At weddings generally a piper is engaged, and as all present are expected to contribute towards paying him, he not unfrequently makes a good day's work of it. Here however no piper could be had, the district not supporting one, and his place was therefore filled by a self-taught youthful fiddler, whose physiognomy, most expressive of musical taste, was not belied by the skill with which he drew the tones from his crazy instrument. No sooner did Willy commence scraping at his chords than there was a general rush towards the ladies; all however by tacit consent fell back save two, who were allowed to draw their partners from the assembled fair. And the four taking their stand in the centre of the room, music struck up and dancing began. The exact uniformity of time kept by all was most remarkable. Though going through their various steps with the most scrupulous care, all seemed to move with perfect ease, and yet so good and true were their ears, that their every motion, to the very clinking of their heels, corresponded with the inconceivable exactness of clockwork.

The two men who first stood up were fine specimens of the Highlander. Though in years but striplings, they were both above six feet in height, with shoulders broad and stalwart in proportion; and when they warmed with the excitement, and each wildly tossed one arm in the air, while with the other he whirled round a winsome lassie, they presented a picture worthy the canvass of a master. On the music ceasing, the reel terminated, and there was a general call for Rorie. Who Rorie was I of course was ignorant; but I was not destined to remain long in the dark; for very speedily a small dingy object rolled himself out of a corner dingy as himself, and to my surprise and no small annoyance, I recognized in the quaint little being before me none other than our postman, who should have been several miles further on his road with our letters, to meet the southward mail. Unable however, miscreant that he was, to

resist the temptation of the wedding festivities, he had laid aside for the nonce the character of postman, and left the letter-bags to shift for themselves, utterly regardless of the fact that they would now be too late for the present mail, and consequently delayed three days longer, to await the departure of the next. Rorie's misdeeds however had long been dealt with too leniently; and though he rather quailed in our presence, he seemed resolved to put the best face on the matter, and brave it out. His travelling costume being somewhat of the coarsest, he had tried to improve his personal appearance by discarding for the evening a huge weather-proof pilot-coat, originally intended for a person of a much larger mould, with boots to match, and now he stood forth in blue shirt-sleeves, and stockings whose primary hue was lost amid the many-coloured patches with which he had striven to make them last their time. Though once, as he assured us, a fine-looking youth, and a private in the gallant 93rd, he was now considerably under five feet, and being upwards of sixty, his grizzled head and scanty attire contrasted forcibly with the merry countenance, lit up as it was by a broad grin extending nearly from ear to ear. His appearance was greeted with applause and laughter. For a moment, as he stood in the centre of the floor, the very picture of decrepit old-age, I wondered how such a one could be expected to dance; but as the music struck up, his little figure became instantly endowed with a wonderful agility and animation. He tossed his arms energetically about, crossed his legs, and then threw them out in opposite directions, shuffled and shook, clashed his heels together, sprang up into the air, and with marvellous rapidity threw himself into every conceivable attitude, without once pausing for breath, and all the while keeping most accurate time with the music. This continued for some moments, during which the company were convulsed with laughter, though Rorie himself appeared lost to all around him, carried back possibly to the happy days of his youth, now passed away for ever.

But at length, when his flushed countenance and loud breathing plainly declared that the old man was becoming exhausted, the music ceased, and the little fellow, making his bow to the assembled company, withdrew once more to his dingy corner, and there squatting down, lit up his pipe, to look on with complacency as others stepped forward. On went the dance, sometimes four, sometimes six, or

even eight huddled together, where there was scarce space for them to turn round; and the company, instead of flagging as the hours passed by, only waxed the more eager and impetuous, until the contagion fairly spread to myself, and, roused into emulation by the universal example before me, I ventured with a bonnie lassie to exhibit my powers in a "Reel o' Tulloch." Finding myself however fairly eclipsed,—for an English ballroom is no place to acquire Scotch dances,—I was not sorry to lead my partner back to the bevy in the corner, and did not repeat the experiment, though Walter danced in a most meritorious fashion whenever time or space could be found.

About midnight the select few were requested to partake of supper in the adjoining apartment. We from the Laird's, as the most distinguished, sat at the head of the board; I, as a stranger, taking the post of honour. We were shortly joined by the bride on one side of the table, and the bridegroom on the other, and then followed as many of the "profanum vulgus" as could be accommodated with seats. Occupying the position I did, I was informed that it was expected I should toast the bridal pair,—a duty which, not being able to express myself in appropriate Gaelic, I performed briefly in English, wishing them "a long life and happiness, plenty of chicks, and a warm roost." We then partook of bridecake, which, with the usual ring and sixpence, afforded abundance of merriment. Other toasts followed, interspersed by songs in Gaelic or English, everything being conducted with a propriety which would throw into the shade many a similar festivity in polite society. Indeed, save perhaps one or two objectionable expressions let fall by the *roué* retired "military" Rorie, not a coarse word nor a rude remark was heard to mar the decorum of the evening.

Toddy having been discussed, no one taking beyond a second glass, and those only small ones, we returned to the ballroom, while others in turn were regaling themselves. For that purpose the musician now absented himself, one or two of the men acting as his substitutes, by "chanting" reels for the others to dance to, preserving the measure and cadence of the bagpipe in a wonderful manner.

For some time I looked on, entertained by the demure modesty of the maidens, the agility and animation of the men, and the curious

musical exhibition. How men could keep up an imitation of the incessant drone of the pipe without any perceptible pause was a marvel; yet they did so, though the perspiration seemed to ooze through every pore from the exertion, and their countenances became almost livid. Presently, growing tired of an amusement into which I could not myself fully enter, and hearing that it was not likely to cease till daylight, I quietly took my departure for the Laird's. Subsequently however I learnt that, by so doing, I had missed the most interesting ceremony of the occasion,—a ceremony which, like the Gaelic language itself, from its very nature, appears to bespeak an Eastern origin.

At a late hour the bride retires to her chamber (on the present occasion a peat-built shed at the end of the cottage), attended by her maidens; and a sufficient time having been allowed her to disrobe, the bridegroom then follows accompanied by his men, who as they assist him in removing his attire, toss into the air each consecutive article of dress, as he casts it off; and all present vie with each other in striving to catch it, success in this being deemed a good omen of peculiar potency. A glass of whisky is passed round to each of the guests, who then return to the ballroom, and the dancing recommences, to be kept up with the increased spirit till daylight.

These wedding festivities not unfrequently extend over three or four days in succession; their length indeed depends upon the day of the week on which the marriage takes place, for they are usually continued till the following Sunday, when the newly-married pair attend the kirk together, for the first time as man and wife; and notwithstanding the proverbial propensity for drink among the Scotch generally, in this neighbourhood I am told it is seldom that a case of drunkenness occurs, many of the best dancers and singers, being disciples of Father Matthew.

Scarcely had I left the scene of merriment, vainly flattering myself that my escape had been unobserved, when I found myself joined by the bride's father, who with the well-bred politeness which, so far as my own experience goes, seems to be habitual to the Highlander, offered to attend me home. And though I remonstrated at the proffered attention, he still persisted in accompanying me some distance on the way.

Though the season was far advanced, the air was still so mild,

that the shepherd walked by my side without any covering on his head. My road lay along the shores of an arm of the sea. The northern lights were darting through the heavens, and every ray being vividly reflected in the bay sleeping beneath, the effect was singular and impressive. At times it was difficult to distinguish "the march" between sky and water, both elements being in appearance equally irradiated.

The distance between the cottage and the Laird's was under two miles; I soon therefore parted from my companion, and reached home, having enjoyed the evening very much.

The novelty of the thing had afforded entertainment, and I was much pleased with the picture of Highland life and manners which it presented. The primitive simplicity, and yet the absence of all boorish coarseness, the innate good-breeding and propriety of manner, were to me a matter of agreeable surprise. The occasional bursts of animation, and wild gestures of the young men, only displayed to me glimpses of that spirit, what has made the Scotch nation what it is, and swollen the page of Britain's history with the deeds of her northern sons.

LETTER XII.

THERE is an odd custom prevalent in these primitive regions, anent the names of individuals. Supposing a man to be called by his Christian name, his surname is gradually lost sight of, while his children receive his Christian name as their own surname. Whether this extends so far as the parish-register, I am unable to say; but it certainly is so in common parlance, and everyday intercourse. For instance, a lad who sometimes attends me in my rambles, as a gilly, is the son of Lachlan Ross. Lachlan himself however has long since lost every name but his Christian one, abbreviated into Lacky; and his son, instead of being Johnny Ross, is Johnny Lacky. Our friend the fox-hunter is a similar instance. His name is Archibald M'Donald; but Gillespie being the Gaelic for Archibald, the surname is dropped, and he is always addressed as Gillespie; while his son, instead of being Donald M'Donald, is Donald Gillespie. This probably is a practice which has grown into use from the difficulty of distinguishing individuals where, as used formerly to be the case almost universally, and as is so still in some localities, the same name belongs in common to many different persons, often not connected at all, or only by such remote links as would puzzle any but a Scot to discover.

Since the last accounts I sent you, there has been a decided change in the weather, which suddenly became much colder, and gave every promise of an early and severe winter. Even on the low and sheltered ground there was a thin sprinkling of snow lying for the space of a day; and the exposed heights, within sight from the windows, are still covered with a thin fleecy cap.

Thus warned that the open season was drawing to its close, we resolved to have one more expedition to the forest, before Walter and I should terminate our campaign and depart for the South.

But the day appointed proved too wet, and we were forced to defer the expedition till a favourable change should take place.

Three days of rain and storm were succeeded by the wished-for improvement; and the weather clearing up in the forenoon, I sallied forth with my gun, attended by the above-named Johnny, to ramble along the rocky shores of the bay. As I reached the beach, a flock of wild-ducks were drifting about like so many tiny boats at anchor, but unfortunately just out of reach. A little further on, a saucy grebe kept diving and sporting on the water, apparently quite indifferent to my presence, though within an easy distance for the gun. Provoked at the cool *nonchalance* of the little creature, I determined to punish his temerity by a few shot-corns; but the very instant my gun flashed, the bird, with the rapidity of lightning, disappeared beneath the surface, to rise again and continue his gambols, this time at a safer distance. In walking along, I came across two or three more birds of the same kind, but though I watched my opportunity, and aimed with the greatest precision, their wonderful facility in disappearing quite baffled my attempts.

Presently Johnny informed me, that by turning to the left, and creeping over a bank, I should command a view over a small salt-water loch, where I might very probably get a shot at some one or more of the many waterfowl generally frequenting it, for the sake of the herrings with which it abounded. I took the hint, and slowly working my way over the bank, all the while keeping a sharp look-out, at length seated myself behind a grey block of stone; but not a living thing was visible. I had not, however, sat a couple of minutes in this position, when I was surprised on observing six birds appear on the surface of the water just beneath me. They had evidently been diving for food, and had just emerged for breath. I cautiously placed my gun upon the rock before me; but so acute was the sight of the birds, that even this slight movement did not escape them, and all six rose in a body. No time was to be lost; in an instant I fired amongst them, and one fell dead. My second barrel followed immediately, and a second fell wounded. As both had dropped into the water, I was at a loss how to get either of them, especially the wounded one. But Johnny suggested, that if we sat still, the dead bird would drift ashore, and we might watch the movements of the other. This was soon verified; for in ten minutes

the first bird was lying on the shingle, and we were watching the second, as he made his way to the opposite shore. Presently he scrambled up the beach, and we started on a circuit, so as to come upon him unawares. Johnny proved a true guide, bringing me to the exact spot: and as the bird scuttled down to the loch, at our approach, I fired, and laid him dead just by the water's edge. The two birds proved to be mergansers, both drakes, and in most beautiful plumage. Their throats, well stuffed with small herrings, proved what had been their occupation.

We now waited for some time, hoping that the four birds which had gone away might return to look after their wounded friends; but they came not, and we resumed our rambles. My attendant presently pointed out to me a spot, where a nephew of the Laird's had lately accomplished a feat, not much less marvellous than the fabulous one of catching a weasel asleep; for seeing a cormorant standing on the beach, with head snugly hidden beneath his wing, he crept in upon it without his shoes, and actually seized the bird while still napping.

A little further on, I sat down among some pinnacle-shaped rocks, rising like so many needles from a small promontory, and amused myself by watching some children fishing for their dinners; the water being a good depth to the very edge of the rock. Having caught upwards of a score, the little urchins took their departure, and left me gazing musingly into the green depths beneath. Johnny soon pointed out a dark object flying towards us, which, on its nearer approach, proved to be a cormorant, bent upon the same errand as the children who had just left us; the spot being a favourite resort of the kind of fish called "cuddies." We stood motionless, and the bird, ignorant of our proximity, came on, and alighting within a short distance of us, commenced diving for his meal. Though within an easy shot, I could not bring myself to mar its happiness so ruthlessly as to fire. But at length, when within thirty or forty yards, he suddenly caught sight of us, and at once rose into the air, and was suffered to depart without molestation.

Beyond the promontory lay a quiet little cove, and as we approached a fishing-boat, lying upside down on the beach, a mountain hare, now almost white, sprang from beneath its cover, and bounded up the cliff. I fired; but the animal, though much disabled, still

struggled on, and, to put an end to its sufferings, we scrambled up the rocks in pursuit. On reaching a birchen copse above the cliff, a long shot secured my hare; and pausing by the ruins of a deserted cottage, I began to ponder upon the policy which had bartered the lives of human beings for those of "the beasts that perish," and desolated so many of what were once happy hearths, merely to provide a greater range and fuller security for the grouse, the moorfowl, and the deer. While occupied with these thoughts, I remarked that the cottage had been built within what, at first sight, I imagined to be one of the sacred circles of the Druids; but Johnny informed me that it was one of those objects, so full of interest to the archæologist, as a vestige of an age and generation long since passed away, the original use of which it is difficult to decide,—a Pictish tower.

Forming a circle, about thirty yards in diameter, its wall was nearly two yards in thickness, and though crumbled away all round to the same horizontal level, yet, from the great unevenness of the ground, it was much higher in some parts than in others. Composed entirely of blocks of stone, roughly hewn and uncemented by any mortar, on one side, where the ground sloped rapidly away, it still rose to the height of about twenty feet; and here I could distinguish the traces of an old doorway, a specimen of very simple and unpretending masonry, being a square hole about four feet high, surmounted by a huge triangular block of stone, resting on side-posts roughly cut from the rock.

Though the first of the kind I had myself seen, Johnny informed me that there were not less than a score more, in better or worse preservation, within the boundaries of the Laird's domains. At the distance of but a few miles, he said, there were the remains of one situated in the centre of a large loch; nothing, however, now being left beyond the foundations, and those only visible when the water was very low; though tradition averred that the tower had been originally built high and dry on an island, which afterwards, from some mysterious cause, had in one night sunk beneath the surface of the waters, never to emerge again. Another erection of the same kind is still, I believe, standing, though in a very dilapidated state, on a solitary rock somewhere off the western coast. Though the spirit of the storm has for centuries sported around it, though many a thousand times embosomed in the billow's rude embrace, the old

tower, venerable in decay, still rears its head above the waters, still flings from its crumbling sides the waves that threaten destruction.

Within a couple of miles of the Laird's house, a small stream falls tinkling down the depths of a bosky ravine, on its way from a mountain loch to the blue waters of the ocean below. The wanderer who climbs his way up its rocky channel, will find more than one of those calm retreats, where nature lies sleeping in miniature.

Above, the birch and the mountain-ash weave their tangled boughs into a canopy to temper the rays of the sun, within whose grateful shade diminutive waterfalls are leaping over rocks of a size proportionate, clad in a velvet robe of the richest green, bound together by gnarled and knotted roots, and crowned by tufts of heather and foxglove. Dwarf fern are flinging their long arms athwart the sparkling stream, and with grasses of different sorts are dancing to its music. In one place the water has collected in a pool, its bottom paved with pebbles, and the silvery trout may be seen as they glance through its transparent depths; depths, pure enough to please the most fastidious nymph that ever bathed her feet by classic fountain, or surveyed her lovely form mirrored in its translucent waters. In another spot, issuing from a dark-looking hole in the midst of a bed of luxuriant grass, studded over with yellow-flowered water-plants, and hemmed in by a forest of green horsetails and snake-grass, the stream is welling upwards from one of Nature's own aqueducts, hidden within the bowels of the earth. Thence wending its way silently over the dank herbage, it soon reaches a harder channel, and leaping over rocky barriers in a series of cascades, dances along its downward course in a thousand jets and leaps, no two of which are alike.

Such are one or two of the choicest scenes which Nature unfolds to the votary who seeks her in these her innermost shrines. And in one of these is to be found another specimen of the Pictish masonry. A cleft in the rock forms the entrance into a dark, subterranean passage, which opens into a large vaulted chamber, circular in form, and sufficiently high for a man of moderate dimensions to stand in, without endangering his head. The walls are roughly cut, nor are there visible traces of anything which could afford a clue to the purpose for which the cave was intended. A few bones are strewn over the damp floor of rock, but they, doubt-

less, are the only surviving remains of animals, who, in their last solemn hour, have dragged their aged limbs thither, actuated by an instinctive dread, common to most wild animals, of having their death-struggle exposed to the unholy gaze of the world. In all probability it was employed as a place of concealment in the time of danger; though for security, or as a stronghold, it could never have been depended upon, since a very slight amount of labour could have at any time turned into it the whole waters of the burn; and thus any who had there sought refuge might have been forced from their sanctuary, or drowned in the cavern.

A curious piece of Pictish workmanship, though differing somewhat from the remains already described, was lately discovered quite accidentally, within half a mile of the Laird's house, by some labourers employed in turning up with the spade the rough surface of a piece of waste ground, in order to fit it for cultivation. The curiosity of one of them was aroused, when, on driving his tool into the ground, he felt the soil give way beneath it. He repeated the blow, and this time the earth crumbling away, revealed a dark hole, evidently of some depth. The rest being summoned to the spot, their united labours soon laid bare a large slab of rock, and on the removal of this they discovered a passage about two feet in width and six deep, the sides of which were built up with rough blocks of stone. One of the men now descended, and throwing out with his spade the earth which had fallen in, groped his way along the passage, until he found himself stopped by a wall, of the same rough construction as the sides. The passage was slightly curved, about thirty feet long, and towards the far end grew a little wider as well as deeper. But it contained nothing beyond the little earth which had fallen in from above. For what purpose the place could have been originally destined, I leave others more learned than myself in such matters to decide. Possibly further remains may be found on some future occasion, which will throw more light upon the question; though I believe this is not the only place of the kind which has been discovered.

The top of a rising ground, near at hand, is consecrated as the last earthly resting-place of some hero of a bygone age, whose name and deeds, unchronicled, have, like himself, become forgotten. But though the tomb itself, rudely constructed out of slabs of rock, never

touched by chisel, still remains to tell of the past, the bones which it once contained have long since been scattered to the winds of heaven.

But "*hactenus hæc:*" to return to my rambles. After my attendant and I had examined the Celtic tower, and carried on a learned archæological discussion, in which Johnny had decidedly the best of it, we turned our faces to the hill, and purposing to visit a mountain loch, often frequented by ducks, commenced the ascent of a very steep brae in the eye of a cutting wind. On the way we flushed five woodcocks, two of which fell to my gun. Just as we reached the crest of the hill, the loch now lying a little before us, a small flock of ducks rose out of reach, warned doubtless by my shot at the last woodcock. Crossing the loch, they of course communicated the alarm to every bird there, and I had the mortification of seeing a couple of wild geese, and some more ducks, go off in the wake of the first flock. The loch being now cleared, with the exception of a few gulls and coots, not worth their salt, we turned our steps homewards, and arrived there just as night closed in upon us.

I now extract from my Diary.—

Tuesday.—There was again a slight fall of snow in the night, but by our breakfast-hour all traces of it had disappeared, except on the highest hills; and though a few ominous clouds were still hovering about, the day, on the whole, seemed fair and bright. As our departure for the South could not be delayed beyond the end of the week, we resolved to seize the present opportunity, and start for the hills at once. Provisions had been in readiness for some days, and in less than an hour after breakfast Walter and I were off with the trap and ponies for the foxhunter's cottage.

Finding him at home, we apportioned out the baggage into three lots, as nearly equal as possible; and each bracing on his burden, we set off across the moors for the shooting-cottage in the forest. Our burdens proving by no means light, we rather shrank from facing the precipitous side of Ben-Fuoghlin, and kept along the bottom of the Strath,—a route less fatiguing though rather longer. After we had walked about three miles, and had come to the foot of the lofty Creag-an-Islair (the Craig of the Eagle), the sky clouded over, and a heavy bank of snow came floating over the top of the hill to our right, leaving a thin fleecy veil on the hillside, reaching down to a certain level, below which none of it descended.

It is a curious fact, which I have been told more than once by the Highlanders, that those, whose life is spent year after year among the mountains, have little need of a thermometer, the hills around answering the same purpose; for, as a general rule, the snow descends and lingers on the hills, down to a certain level, in a certain temperature; the colder the air, the lower the line of snow; and this is often observable for an extent of many miles. So that an experienced eye can tell, even with some degree of accuracy, the degree of cold from the depth of the skirts of the snowy mantle that robes the mountain-side.

But to return. As we passed beneath the Creag-an-Islair, we observed an eagle soaring through the snow-cloud, his course being towards the sea. Presently a second was visible, wheeling majestically above the summits of the craig; and as we now mounted the hill on the opposite side of the strath, a third made his appearance, both of them soon following in the line taken by the first.

This, Gillespie assured us, was an omen foreboding no good. It was quite clear that these "winged princes of the air" anticipated something more than a passing fall of snow, or why should all three have unanimously betaken themselves down to the neighbourhood of the sea, where snow never lies long, unless it were that instinct had taught them that their usual haunts in the mountain would shortly be untenantable? However we were not to be easily intimidated; and, thinking that it was scarcely yet late enough in the season for the snow to fall in great quantity, we still hoped for better things, and held on our way.

On reaching the top of the ridge, the scene which presented itself was both novel and extremely beautiful. The highest parts of all the hills around were robed in a veil of snow, so dazzlingly pure that the eye sought relief after dwelling upon it for a moment, and yet so thin and gauze-like that the rocks were still visible peeping through it in countless points. The effect produced altogether reminded me very much, on a large scale, of those beautiful copper-coloured photographic views of mountain scenery which you see gracing the artists' windows in almost every town.

As we began to descend the further side of the hill, a sharp shower of sleet came pelting in our faces, and, thus forced to run for it, we were not long in reaching the shelter of the cottage. As we arrived,

the shepherd, who lived close by, had just come in from a long ramble, and he assured us that there were no deer within four or five miles of the cottage. Accordingly, as it was now too late in the day to admit of our going that distance, we agreed to postpone operations till the morrow.

Having replenished "the inner man" with a portion of the venison slaughtered when we were last at the cottage, with sundry other viands, rendered savoury by that *optimum condimentum* a good appetite, we invited the foxhunter to join us over a glass of toddy, on the understanding that he should in return amuse us, as he had done on a former occasion, by relating some of his sporting reminiscences.

The following are a few of the scraps which my imperfect knowledge of the language in which he spoke enabled me to collect.

He was sitting, one day in spring, on the side of Ben Fuoghlin, occupied in tending a flock of sheep. The lambs were gambolling round their mothers, or, divided into little bands, were chasing each other across the brae, the picture of security and happiness. But how often is the cup dashed from the lip! An eagle suddenly darted by him, and, stooping on the terrified flock, rose again a moment after, bearing off a lamb in his talons. As they mounted into the air, the poor little thing bleated piteously, and struggled so hard that for a time it seemed as though it must escape. But the tyrant's grip was too tight; and having no gun with him, wherewith to stop the marauder in his career, Gillespie could only watch until both captor and caught were lost in the opposite heights of Creag-na-Sturm. On another occasion he saw an eagle seize a lamb in the same manner, but before they had travelled far, the lamb, by a sudden jerk, managed to free itself; and the eagle, on seeing the foxhunter, went off without its prey, though it was killed on the spot by the fall. It is not often however that this noble bird commits any depredations on the flock. Indeed I have heard it argued, and I believe it to be true, that the eagle is rather an advantage than otherwise on a Highland farm. Though he certainly is occasionally guilty of serious harm, his attacks are chiefly confined to the mountain-hare, which in some districts is so very numerous, and so destructive to the pasture intended for the sheep, that it requires thinning; and thus the eagle, instead of being a sub-

ject fit only for extirpation, serves rather to remove a nuisance and befriend the cause of the farmer. If he does on a chance emergency make his foray on the fold, the loss to the owner after all is but small, compared with the numbers which become victims to the cunning of the fox, or perish by falling down the rocks. And surely a highland farmer, with his fifteen thousand sheep, can well afford to lose half a hundred in the year, without missing them.

The following is an incident which occurred to our hero, in those halcyon days of sporting freebootery when poaching was not dealt with as stringently as it now is, and when even the most honest scrupled not to take an occasional buck or fat hind from the forest.

While sitting on the side of a mountain, in one of the wildest and least frequented parts of the Highlands, and occupied in carefully examining, through his "Dollond," the ground about him, Gillespie discovered an odd-looking object, enveloped in a grey plaid, and sitting under a rock on the opposite side of the glen. He presently made out that it was a woman, occupied, as far as he could tell by the aid of his glass, in knitting. As she appeared quite alone, and the spot was one not frequently trod by the foot of woman, for there was no human habitation within some miles, his curiosity was aroused, and he resolved to watch her proceedings, that he might learn, if possible, what could be her motive in seeking such a wild and solitary spot; but though he kept his eye upon her for two good hours, there she still sat without having once moved from her position. In this way hour after hour passed, and there she still sat. It was now afternoon, and still she was there. But at length the mystery was solved. Along the bottom of the glen a man appeared, driving a pony before them; halting as he came just below the woman, he climbed up to her position, and the two then commenced dragging down the hill a large object, which Gillespie's instinct was not long in recognizing as the carcase of a slaughtered deer. It was soon strapped on the back of the pony, and the worthy couple started down the glen with their prize.

It is a common practice with poachers to leave their booty concealed in some snug spot among the hills, until they have a convenient opportunity for fetching it. It is sometimes cut up, as more easy for conveyance, and stowed away in different places, the concealment of it being effected with great skill. I remember an instance

of this which came under my own observation. I was out among the hills, attended by the foxhunter. As we were passing through a glen, the sides and bottom of which were thickly lined with heather, he suddenly stopped, and, with a half-uttered malison, pointed to the ground at his feet. I looked, but all I could perceive was that the heather seemed slightly withered; but Gillespie stooped down, and pulling up the heather, which he did without any effort, laid bare the head and hide of a deer, which had been left by some poachers. I might have passed the spot again and again without detecting anything peculiar, but his experienced eye at once saw that there had been foul play.

Two or three adventures were related to us, which, as being of a somewhat questionable character, Gillespie, either from modesty or policy, attributed to another person, whom he professed himself to have "kenned weel" in former days, though I have little doubt that I might have applied to him the language of Horace, "mutato nomine de te narratur," without being guilty of any serious departure from the truth. One of these shows a pious fraud commonly resorted to by poachers, in order that, in case they should be caught, and tried before a justice for deer-killing, each may be able to swear conscientiously that, though in the company of his friend, he did not see him perpetrate the offence. A couple go out together, and share between them the sport and the danger in the following manner. When a deer is discovered, one of them, according to previous agreement, creeps in to have the first shot, while the other averts his head or keeps out of sight, that, should the shot prove fatal, he may not be a witness. Should the deer be only wounded, they then change places, and the second takes the task in hand, his friend now in turn holding aloof and avoiding the sight.

My authority, said he, "minded" a pair who once went to commit their foray together. They came upon a herd of deer, and one of them shot at a fine stag, which he wounded somewhere in the spine, in such a manner that though, while stationary, the beast was apparently as well and vigorous as ever, yet as soon as it attempted to move off, it proved to be so disabled that it could scarcely drag its limbs over the ground. Having accomplished thus much, the poacher then lay down in the heather, taking care to be out of sight, while his ally approached the wounded animal with the intention of

terminating its life. Finding that it was unable to escape, he would not fire at it, but preferred stepping in and settling the matter with his knife. After walking several times round the poor creature, which, disabled as it was, still strove to keep a formidable front, he at length succeeded in seizing it by one hind leg; but now he found his match; for though the beast was unable to escape by flight, it could resist and struggle. And struggle and resist it *did;* for when his companion rose from the heather, some time after, expecting to find it all over, he saw his friend and the deer still straining their very utmost, the one exerting all his energies to shake off his foe, while all the strength and activity of the other were needed to prevent his being thrown violently to the ground, in unpleasant proximity to a pair of formidable antlers. Again therefore the poacher lay down, leaving the two to carry on their combat unwitnessed. After wheeling round more than once, and well-nigh getting rid of his antagonist, the deer began to show signs of distress. His open mouth and heaving flanks told plainly that death was at work, and the poacher, suddenly springing forward, leaped upon his back, and throwing his arms round the animal's neck, remained so immovably fixed that by no efforts could it dislodge him. And now the other poacher again rose, expecting that by this time at least the struggle must have terminated. But on seeing how matters were, he forgot his caution, and stepped forward to aid in the contest. As he approached, the wearied animal made one desperate and prolonged attempt to unseat his rider, which he was just on the point of effecting, when the poacher, drawing his knife by an immense effort, succeeded in plunging it to the hilt in the animal's breast, and as his comrade came up, the victor and the vanquished sank down together.

Notwithstanding the extraordinary powers of sight, smell, and hearing with which the deer is endowed, he may occasionally be taken by surprise, the very acuteness of those organs at times serving to betray him into a false feeling of security. Instance the following:—A shepherd, in his rambles among the hills, once came upon a deer, taking his morning meal in a snug retreat in the most unfrequented part of the mountain, where doubtless he had many a time fed before without disturbance. So utterly regardless of danger was the animal, that the shepherd, removing his shoes, cautiously walked in upon him from behind, and struck him a hard

blow on the back before his presence was discovered. Had the man but carried something heavier than a slight staff, he might have slain or disabled the deer at a blow, and earned for himself a good meal for many a day to come.

The following is an account of a somewhat similar incident which occurred to the foxhunter himself.

He was wending his way homewards through the forest, after nightfall, attended only by a faithful hound. His route led him up a very steep "bealloch," or pass, lying between two lofty mountain-summits, and through which the deer were in the habit of going, almost nightly, on their way to a sheltered corrie beyond. When about half-way up, his dog, which was a few yards in advance, suddenly sprang forward with a furious bay at some object hidden in the gloom ahead. In a moment after, down came a large hind, followed closely by the dog, and, both rattling past him, tore down the hill at a mad pace, amongst a loud clatter of loosened stones, and were speedily lost to sight and hearing in the depths of the glen below. Gillespie called to his hound, but in vain, and then continued his route, trusting that the truant, wearied out, or losing his game in the darkness, would presently return and overtake him. He had not however mounted much higher, when he again heard the bay of his dog below, and, from its increasing loudness, perceived that they were ascending the brae in his direction. Soon they approached nearer, and the loud panting of the two, audible in the profound stillness of the night, as they toiled painfully up the rocky pass, told plainly how severe had been the chase. Presently the deer was dimly visible through the gloom, though not many yards distant, the dog straining close at her flank, and striving each moment to fix his fangs in the animal and bring her down. Acting on the impulse of the moment, and without thinking what he did, Gillespie concealed himself behind a moss-hagg, and as the two rushed by he sprang out, and striking the terrified and exhausted deer on the back of the head with a stout staff he bore in his hand, by one blow felled it to the ground. In a moment his trusty hound had fixed his fangs firmly in the throat of the prostrate animal, and the death-rattle greeted his ears. But now, the deed completed, and the excitement of the moment passed, he was seized with pity and remorse at the thoughtlessness of which he had been guilty in slaying a deer which he did

not need, in a place from which he could with difficulty get it removed, and last, and possibly also *least*, in direct defiance of his duty. The blood of the slaughtered hind seemed to call to him from the ground; to use his own words, he "was weel nigh greeting as he saw the creature lying dead at his feet," and he vowed that he "wadna touch ane hair o' it." The next time he passed that way, the fox, the gled, and the corbie had made their meals on its flesh, and its bones were bleaching in the sun.

Here are one or two interesting particulars connected with the habits of deer. First, as regards the disappearance of the horns which are yearly shed by the stags. It has been thought extraordinary, that in a district where there are perhaps several thousand deer, and consequently some hundreds of stags, who annually cast off a couple of horns each, not more than a few score of these horns are ever found. Our informant accounts for this fact in the following way. They either bury their horns, or destroy them with their teeth. He says he has himself seen deer, at the period of spring, when they cast their horns, trampling them down in the moist soil of the peat-bogs, which are so common among the hills. That they were so employed he has abundant proof, for more than once, after thus disturbing the deer, he has gone to the spot, and discovered the remains of horns, half buried and broken up, the fragments bearing the marks of teeth upon them; and though it may be thought that the horns are of a substance too hard for this, yet the jaw of the deer is very powerful. Another consideration which seems to make this the more probable is, that scarcely ever are the horns of a young stag discovered, being of course, from their size, more easy of destruction than the antlers of a full-grown stag.

Secondly, as regards the formation of a herd. A hind's young do not, as in the case of many other animals, desert their mother when they cease to suck, but continue to attend her as long as she lives; and as they in their turn—*i.e.* the females among them—soon rear each of them a progeny to themselves, she is often accompanied by many successive generations, who continue to resort together to the same haunts and parts of the forest for many years. Thus is a herd formed, and this herd is invariably headed by some patriarchal stag, whose powers, yet unimpaired, support the dignity conferred by years. The young stags put forth a pair of small horns at the

age of two years, at first but a few inches long. The brow-antlers are the first branch, an extra point appearing generally every year up to six, and occasionally seven, though some never acquire more than four or five. After a certain age the horns begin to dwindle, and grow shorter every year. But no rules can be of universal application. A full-grown stag is sometimes seen with no branches but the brow-antlers. A head of this kind is called a "cabar slaht," or rod-like antler, and, though not so handsome as a royal head, is still curious and rather rare.

I have now given you the substance of our Highlander's remarks, so far as I have thought they would prove interesting. The rest of my letter must be devoted to an account of our own proceedings in the forest.

Wednesday.—A fair, but cloudy and uncertain-looking morning. Setting out soon after daybreak, we made straight for the corrie, hoping to find the deer still within its shelter; but they had risen earlier than ourselves, and as we came up the glen, were just disappearing through the Bealloch Mohr. We watched them as they passed the horizon by ones and twos, and then knowing that it was useless to follow, as they were already so far in advance, and would shortly be beyond the march, we turned our steps in the opposite direction.

The clouds were resting on the hill-tops, and though we were not yet in a snow-storm, still all around began to assume a threatening aspect. For an hour or more we roamed on without seeing any game, though we came across traces of some which had passed in the night; and at length, on reaching the crest of a short ascent, we suddenly came upon a hind and stag lying in a snug hollow. Though we dropped to the ground at once, and though the wind was blowing directly in our teeth, the stag was evidently uneasy, and, rising slowly from his lair, stood looking anxiously around him. For nearly an hour we remained motionless and prostrate, Gillespie alone watching the game. The stag, he said, was but a small one, out of condition, as indeed they always are after the rutting season, and bearing but a poor head, while the hind was a very fine animal, dark-skinned, and in full flesh. After a short discussion therefore we agreed that it would be best to secure the latter, as the more desirable for the larder; and then retiring a few

paces down the hill, we turned round the angle of a rock, under the leadership of Gillespie, to creep in upon them by the course of a burn. Scarcely had we started when a storm of hail came on,—at first however not very severe, and we continued on our way. Presently pausing, Gillespie reconnoitred round the end of a block of stone. It was now hailing very severely, and just as I glanced over Gillespie's shoulder, the stag was disappearing down the opposite side of the hill; and the hind, unable to face the hail any longer, was in the act of rising to follow. What was to be done? Ten to one if we should get them again in as good a position. Accordingly, though full a hundred and twenty yards distant, I instantly adopted Gillespie's suggestion, and putting gun to my shoulder, and aiming as truly as the hail dashing into my face would allow, I fired at the retreating form of the hind. The shot however appeared to have taken no effect, and the rifle I had with me having but one barrel, I was obliged to watch the receding animal with feelings of disappointment and chagrin, which were in nowise lessened when Walter, stepping forward, delivered his two barrels with the same result, and the deer, now too far off to be hit, except by accident, soon disappeared from sight. Then loading as rapidly as possible, we all ran forward, and looked down the descent by which the deer had taken their departure; but the hail was falling too thickly to admit of our discerning any object beyond a few yards.

We now took shelter under a huge fragment of rock, until the hail shortly afterwards abating allowed us to continue our rambles. But though we came across the traces of deer in many places, and once or twice saw the animals themselves at a great distance, we returned to the cottage in the evening without getting another shot.

Thursday.—Another fall of snow during the night. Though the neighbourhood of the cottage is still free from it, or only slightly sprinkled, the higher ground on all sides is clad in white. Fearing lest we should be snowed up in the hills, we resolved to go home to the Laird's, only making a detour through the forest, in order, if possible, to get a farewell shot.

The morning was beautifully bright and clear, and, though provoked at being obliged to abandon the expedition, still with everything around us wearing so novel and imposing an appearance, we could not but be interested, and accordingly started in high spirits.

But presently, as we rose above the glen, the toilsome exertion of walking in the snow began to tell upon us, and we were compelled to make frequent pauses to rest and recover breath. The labour of climbing, to which a Southron is little accustomed, I had found at all times severe; and though gradually becoming inured to it, and latterly equal, as I had fondly imagined, to any amount of fatigue, nothing I had yet experienced had approached in the least degree to the immense strain produced on the muscles in ascending the steep sides of the mountain, with the snow half a foot, or even in the higher regions nearly a foot, in depth. The process of descending too was almost equally trying, as the foot constantly stumbled against, or slipped from, the stones hidden beneath the snow, which more than once occasioned very awkward falls.

After two hours of climbing, our perseverance was rewarded, as we came in view of an immense herd, numbering not much fewer than two hundred deer, and spreading over an open field of snow, half a mile or more in extent, but at such an elevation that it was vain, in the present state of things, to think of getting up to them. We could only therefore pause and admire, and then continue our route. Soon we saw another herd, composed almost entirely of stags, of which Gillespie counted not less than seventy; but they were making for the highest passes in the mountain, and as our ambition had somewhat dwindled in its aspirations under the chilling influences of the snow, we did not attempt to follow. Now and then, as we pursued our way, we came across a solitary pair, or a small family of deer; but all were on the alert, and not to be approached. And as we ourselves were visible to a great distance in the snow, we began to despair of nearing anything, and turned our steps towards home.

After some time, as we crossed an open moor not often frequented by them, we discovered a herd of ten, occupied in scraping up the snow with their hoofs, and feeding on the grass and moss which they thus laid bare. The position was apparently very favourable, a large ledge of rock intervening between them and us, which would effectually screen our approach.

Though already well nigh wearied out, we lost no time in commencing a forced march towards them, Gillespie, as usual, taking the lead.

Two stags soon started up in our front, and making straight for the herd bade fair to spoil our sport; but while we were anxiously watching the result, they unexpectedly turned off to the left, and disappearing in a hollow, to our delight left the herd undisturbed. We now resumed the stalk, and after much hard walking and climbing, found ourselves breathless at the ledge of rock above-mentioned. After standing a moment to recover breath, I crept forward along the rock on my hands and knees to reconnoitre the position of the deer. They were all together, two or three still feeding, the others lying, but all out of gunshot; but while I was looking around to discover any way of approaching nearer, an old hind, hitherto concealed behind a bank of snow, rose to her feet within eighty yards, and stood staring me in the face. I remained perfectly motionless, but she evidently saw me, and being a fine yeld hind, I took a deliberate aim at her shoulder and fired. She at once turned round, and though, as her floundering gait betrayed, severely wounded, she followed the rest of the herd up the steep hill-side at a mad pace. I started in pursuit, but the depth of the snow soon brought me to a stand, and I quietly suffered the fox-hunter to go after her alone. He too however turned back on reaching the top of the hill; for though he declared his full assurance that the animal could not live, it was impossible to say how far she might not take us from our route. Accordingly, as it was already growing dusk, our homeward route was resumed in good earnest. As we reached the brink of a deep ravine, along the bottom of which lay our path, two objects suddenly sprang up in our front, and, just as we discovered them to be deer, plunged into the depths of the ravine. We sent all our bullets flying after them, as a parting volley to the forest, but they served only to awake the echoes of the cliffs around.

We had now about nine miles between us and home, and, there being no moon, it was momently becoming darker. The walking therefore proved most difficult and fatiguing, from the roughness of the ground, and the impossibility of seeing at all where we were going.

Before reaching home, we had waded seven times through the Redburn, running in one or two places so rapidly that we only retained our footing by all three clinging to each other, and thus pre-

senting our united strength to its force. Several times we had to make our way down the steep sides of cliffs, feeling with our hands before every fresh footstep, where one blnnder might have hurled us to destruction.

On the whole therefore, the recollection of that night's march will not be among the most agreeable of my Highland reminiscences. We reached home thoroughly done up, and uncheered by the pleasure of success. Two days after, we bade adieu to the hospitable roof of our friend the Laird, who, as well as the rest of his family, had treated us with a liberality and consideration which will not easily be effaced from our memory, and which stamped him as a true son of the land where of old not even the poorest peasant closed his door at night till he had first stood before his threshold, and looked to the four quarters of the heavens, if haply he might see a stranger whom he could welcome to his hearth.



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